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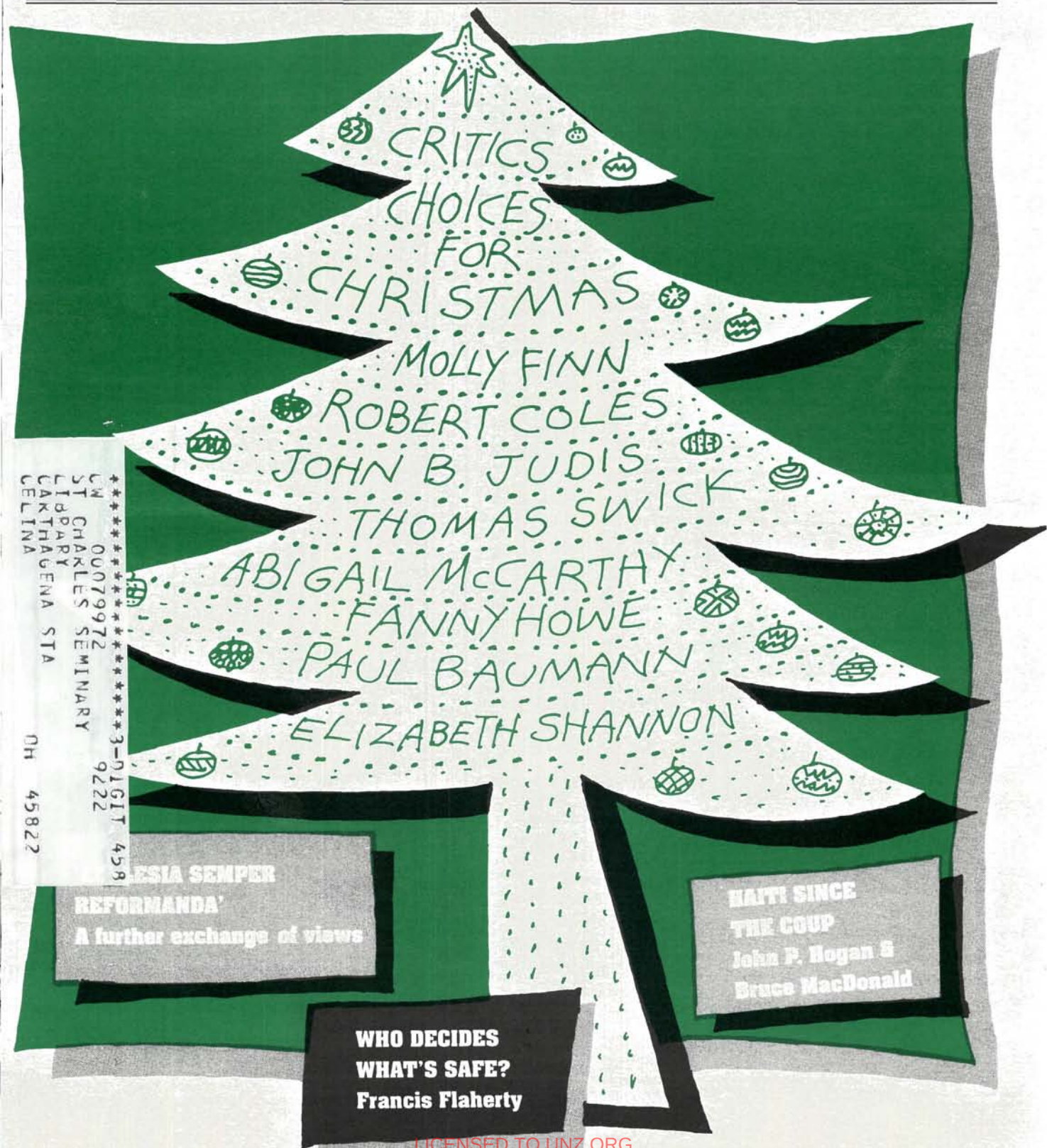

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CORRESPONDENCE

The untouchable Thomas

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: Good Lord, I don't know how you did it but, in your series of editorials on the Clarence Thomas nomination [August 9, October 25, November 8], you were able to cut through all the charges and countercharges and single out the true villains in the caper—Democratic liberals. As I read it, you chastised the dummies for not being open to a conservative black experience which Thomas could bring to the Supreme Court. And, besides that, they did the unspeakable by leaking the sexual harassment charge of Anita Hill. (Oddly, you and your buddies, Orrin Hatch and Alan Simpson, seemed more excited over this than Ms. Hill was.)

True, you did criticize George Bush for his cynicism in choosing Thomas. But when it came to Thomas, you were for him, sort of; maybe not for him, sort of; and then for him, because we liberals have to be more open-minded.

And throughout all these hearings, there was poor Clarence; what he had to put up with! So what if he lied through his teeth during both hearings. So what if he used his color and his religious background in the most meretricious ways (did you see the picture of him and his wife in *People* magazine, the two of them on their couch locked in an embrace while reading the Bible?). So what if he proved that he wasn't even remotely as smart as his defenders claimed he was. Forget all that, you suggest; forget as well the record of his last ten years in public life, and hope that his black experience will resurface to make him a compassionate judge. While we're at it, since you're so open-minded, why not the Rev. Al Sharpton, or Ray Charles, or Whoopi Goldberg? Or Anita Hill? I assume that any black background will do.

Why is that occasionally I find myself flipping back to the cover of *Commonweal* to make sure I'm not reading *Commentary*?

JOHN P. MURNION

From the Editors: Our correspondent makes a number of points readers may wish to ponder. On his last point: The easy way is to check the *back* cover. If it has a four-color ad for Chivas Regal, Volvo, or Absolut, it's not *Commonweal*.

Correction: In our editorial "Courting Diversity" (November 8) we incorrectly stated that George Bush voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Bush was opposed to the bill, but did not vote on it. He was not a congressman at the time. We apologize for the error.

THE EDITORS.

Compromise precluded

Ann Arbor, Mich.

To the Editors: Who would not welcome the consultation between President Bush and Congress on future nominees to the Supreme Court that you suggest in your editorial ["Cynics at War," October 25]? But this won't happen—should not happen—because abortion has made compromise impossible. Abortion explains why Clarence Thomas was nominated, why he was opposed, and why his confirmation hearings became a grotesque farce. Abortion explains the Bork fiasco. Abortion explains the savagery of much of our political discourse and the cheapening of our culture.

One Monday in the spring of 1993, the Supreme Court will announce the reversal of *Roe* v. *Wade*. Only then will it be possible for the president and Congress to talk about Supreme Court nominees.

JIM MANNEY

Proprietary information

Boston, Mass.

To the Editors: To argue his point that the Democratic party has kept its head in the sand rather than deal with the issue of "racialized politics," Fred Siegel ["Conservative Opportunism, Liberal Cowardice," November 8) cites Peter Brown, a journalist, as his source for a "fascinating episode," in which I, as Democratic National Chairman, "chose to deep-six" a report portraying the Democratic party in an unfavorable light.

In some ways politics and sports are alike. And I know of no coach worthy of respect who has conducted a scouting report of the competition or an analysis of his own team's strengths and weaknesses and who then elects to release the report to curious journalists and, thus, to the opposition. A party chairman should be at least as prudent. Despite the curiosity of the press, those reports are internal documents on which game plans and campaign strategies are based. *Commonweal* readers may draw their own conclusions as to the impact of race on American politics, but in this instance Siegel's reliance on Brown's inaccuracies lends no credence to his conclusions.

PAUL G. KIRK, JR.

Mary, Joseph, & Thing

Rome, Italy

To the Editors: Frank McConnell [Correspondence, October 25], by declaring his belief that "the Thing in the Womb is certainly a living something," sparked the following biblical reflection:

In the Greek text of the Gospel of Luke 1:35, the angel's words to Mary can be

(Continued on page 733)

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COMMONWEAL

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Real problems, wrong fix

Careful calculation by disinterested amateur analysts on our staff has found a close correlation between (A) the margin of defeat for the Washington State referendum that would have legalized physician-assisted suicide and (B) the widespread distribution of *Commonweal*'s special supplement [August 9] opposing the initiative. (Divide the margin [95,401 votes], by the number of supplements sold [35,540]; the answer is 2.762, which correlates precisely with our field reports on the number of actual readers per copy.) Power!

As it happens, the same voters in the same election had no clue about where we stood on the notion of term limitations for elected officials; there was no counsel from this corner. Fortunately, they guessed our stance correctly; that initiative also failed. Less fortunately, the idea itself hasn't died. Versions of it have already been enacted into law in some jurisdictions, there is agitation on its behalf in many others, and its proponents will no doubt benefit from studying the mistakes made by its backers in the great-but-small state of Washington: It was not bright, for example, to make the measure retroactively applicable in the very next election, thereby dictating the retirement of a popular and powerful Speaker of the House.

Term limitation at the national level is dubiously legal; the Constitution gives Congress, not local voters, the power to determine qualifications for its members. In terms of political theory it is antidemocratic, disempowering the electorate along with incumbent candidates. It is a blunt weapon, all stick, no carrot; for it offers no reward to any incumbent but punishes all of them—not just those who are deadheads, senile, venal, and/or arrogant but also those (and there are many of them) who are able, hardworking, and responsive to constituents, as well as those indispensable few who are wise and courageous beyond the call of duty. It belittles the need for experience in grasping the intricacies of legislative procedure and of all contemporary governance; and it is an attack on Congress's institutional memory, the care and keeping of which would be handed over to unelected staff members, lobbyists, and journalists.

But, though term limitation is a nonsolution, the contemporary problems it is supposed to address are real. If there is little agreement among Americans about what is to be done, there is near-consensus that, as nation and as society, we are in several kinds of a mess (think of the economy, health care, education, race relations, criminal justice, homelessness...). Those who blame government for all these ills are missing the misfeasance, malfeasance, and nonfeasance of tens of millions of individual citizens as parents, managers, workers, teachers, preachers, bankers, journalists, etc., and of the thousands of formal and informal institutions making up the "private sector." Lacking a strong sense of community, we increasingly lack concern for the common good.

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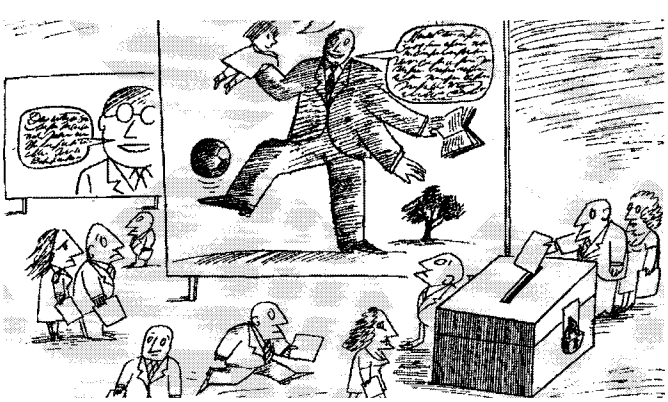
That said, it remains true that we are, by and large, badly governed, and that one very significant reason for our plight—apart from the cynicism, opportunism, venality, cowardice, incompetence of particular officeholders—is the extent of unearned privilege conferred by mere incumbency in office. Given the size and diversity of the electorate in most districts, election campaigns are inherently expensive. Incumbents attract contributions from aggressively self-serving interests precisely because they are incumbents. Not needing party support, they need not yield to party discipline, so that the parties increasingly lack any identity, agenda, or message for the voter. All incumbents have, and many abuse, the franking privilege. Finally, and most frustratingly, the power to address and correct these ills directly and sensibly rests with the incumbents themselves, who share a common interest in maintaining the status quo. Thus far, only a minority have enough courage (or safe-enough seats) to work for reforms that would open up the process and promote reasonably fair electoral competition.

Term limitation, in our view, would certainly change the situation, but for the worse; it is not a rifle but an unaimed blunderbuss. What is to be hoped is that the impetus behind it can be channeled into a focused effort to make campaign reform a critical issue for all office-seekers at the national, state, and perhaps local levels. Public financing and limits on campaign spending aren't the only possibilities. The networks' recent and laudable initiative to accept and divide among themselves a responsibility to provide air time for political debates could be given legislative support; so could the notions of limiting or eliminating the use of thirty-second sloganeering spots in campaigns, and of imposing truth-in-labeling requirements on allegedly independent campaigns paid for with "sewer money"—funds spent on behalf of a candidate but not channeled through his or her campaign committee, thereby not subject to reporting requirements. Another reform worth exploring, briefly discussed in the *New Republic* for November 25 and reportedly endorsed by both (!) the *Nation* and the *Wall Street Journal*, is a measure permitting voters to mark their ballots "In Favor of a New Election" when they find all candidates for a particular office unacceptable. Some think that line on the ballot would encourage cynicism rather than participation. But, unlike term limitation, as writer John Fund points out, this device would not limit but expand the voter's power of choice. That, in our view, ought to be a chief guiding principle for any electoral reform proposal.



GUNS FOR BUTTER

Not long ago, we had the pleasure of chatting with a group of recent Soviet émigrés—four young women from three different republics, brought to lunch in our offices by their English instructor, *Commonweal* author Lee Siegel. (Their assignment, should they wish to undertake it, was to read *and* understand a *Commonweal* editorial. Language did not appear to be the chief barrier.) We talked of many things, and observed a normal range of differences. But one question put to the group got the same answer from each of the four: Not one of them wished to be back in the USSR. There seemed to be no sentiment of longing for Mother Russia, even at her mythical warmest.

Recent news photographs of scavengers in a Moscow dump—some of them members of the Red Army—underscores our visitors' sense of the desolation within the Soviet Union. One wishes they would visit the U.S. Congress, which is having such a hard time deciding whether $1 billion can be transferred from our $291 billion military budget to help insure the Soviet republics don't slip even further into economic, political, and perhaps military free fall.

The concern is real enough, the price manageable; but the consequences of doing nothing or too little could be bizarre. As Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), a supporter of the transfer bill, observed: "We're facing the breakout of the largest arsenal in the world, and people in economic distress will be selling things." Not to put too fine a point on it, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl told a NATO summit meeting in November that the disintegration of the Soviet Union's centralized military control was an "explosive situation," and the Pentagon warned that thousands of Soviet scientists, experts in nuclear and chemical weaponry, are likely to lose their jobs soon and would most likely try to sell their talents to the highest bidder. Already, one Soviet trading company, Chetek, has been set up to market what it calls "peaceful" nuclear explosions. (The company's Canadian representative boasted to the *New York Times*: "We're willing to entertain all ideas. It doesn't matter who, where, or when. We have all the technologies and they're going to be used.")

No wonder Robert Strauss, U.S. ambassador to Moscow, was dismayed at Congress's inability (and, we should add, the administration's ineptness) to transfer the $1 billion from the Pentagon. (At the same time, the House *did* approve $4.2 billion for a limited ABM system, up 29 percent from last year.) Strauss said that some risks are worth taking to help improve the chance that a "moderately stable government and society" will emerge in the Soviet Union. Not only would the $1 billion be used for humanitarian purposes—transporting food and medical supplies on Air Force planes—but some would be assigned for a joint U.S.-Soviet effort to destroy nuclear and chemical weapons in the USSR. Even out-of-work Americans wouldn't object to that. And perhaps one day, when stability and prosperity have settled on the former Soviet Union, our visitors will want to return home, no doubt to translate *Commonweal* editorials for the waiting masses.

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THE MAGIC TOUCH

In the wake of his candid announcement that he had contracted the HIV virus, Earvin "Magic" Johnson has been called a hero and inspiration by many, a hedonist by some, and a tragic figure by nearly all. Johnson has been perhaps the most dominant basketball player of his time—he led the Los Angeles Lakers to five NBA championships—and certainly one of the most congenial spirits ever to have played the game. His athletic accomplishments, with all the attendant wealth, celebrity, and social prominence, made him seem larger than life. His six-foot nine-inch frame didn't hurt, nor did his generosity and personal warmth.

How that will now change is hard to gauge. Following his doctors' suggestions, Johnson has retired from basketball. He says he contracted the fatal virus as a result of years of promiscuous behavior. "The problem is that I can't pinpoint the time, the place, or the woman," he says. "It's a matter of numbers."

Johnson plans to use his fame to help fight AIDS, to educate the public about the deadly disease, and to preach the necessity of what he calls "safe sex." With all the bravado he displayed on the basketball court, Johnson has become evangelical about condoms.

Most people involved in the battle against AIDS have welcomed Johnson's advocacy and praised his honesty. Others have questioned Johnson's smiling endorsement of "safe sex." Abstinence, they assert, is the morally correct and medically reliable answer. Still others retort that any discussion of sexual morality is just an excuse for venting prejudice, ignorance, or prudery. Indeed, Johnson is championed as the "mainstream" heterosexual figure who will remove the stigma attached to AIDS because of its current association with homosexuality and drug use. His condition will remind us that we need a franker and less judgmental attitude about sex.

But it is hard to suppress the suspicion that a little more guilt might prove surprisingly effective in the fight against sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS. True, guilt sometimes consists of an ugly psychological coercion. But it can also be a tool of self-respect and personal accountability. In the era of AIDS, there is nothing abstract about sexual morality. "I did my best to accommodate as many women as I could—most of them through unprotected sex," Johnson said in describing his sex life.

Is the carnival to continue, only with more foolproof accouterments? AIDS is not a punishment for sexual incontinence, but neither is the HIV virus a source of moral wisdom. To question our obsession with sex, and especially with celebrity sex, is not to condemn Johnson, or any other AIDS victim. America did not invent promiscuity, but we have brought a characteristic entrepreneurial zeal to its promotion. Walker Percy thought the American preoccupation with anonymous sex symptomatic of our modern loneliness and despair, our estrangement from ordinary human allegiances. Sex often seems the only "real" thing in a world suffused with material distractions and meaningless entertainments but starved for human connection.

Beyond the undeniable pathos of seeing a young man grapple with mortality well before his time, there has been something hyperbolic about the media and public reaction to Johnson's tragic fate. Yes, it will be a good thing if Johnson's tragedy brings a greater awareness of AIDS and more direct government involvement. But there is something disorienting about keeping our gaze fixed upon a man in the throes of an almost unimaginable agony—it is still not known whether he has passed the virus on to his new bride and unborn child, or how many women he might have infected. Should we not lower our eyes in the presence of such human frailty and pain? Have we not been reminded that, unlike the emptiness of promiscuity and celebrity, the prospect of death confronts us, not with anything larger than life, but with life itself?

REPORT ON HAITI

SINCE THE COUP

THE CHURCH'S SIGNAL FADES

More than two months after the military coup of September 29-30, the prognosis for Haiti is dismal. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's president, remains in exile; the military remains in power; and the poor, who supported Father Aristide—with 70 percent of their vote—last December in Haiti's freest election, wait for his return. In a way that most Americans, more critical and cynical about their own politicians, may find hard to credit, the priest-president embodies whatever hopes the poor retain for some redress of the economic and political injustices that mark that sad land. Amy Wilentz in *In the Parish of the Poor* (Orbis), summed up this relationship: "It is sometimes difficult to know which comes first, the people, or Aristide....The two live in political symbiosis."

The initial and strong reaction of the United States, the Caribbean nations, and the Organization of American States (OAS) included a condemnation of the coup, a demand for Aristide's reinstatement, and when that failed, an economic embargo of the island nation. But it may take more than words and an economic embargo to quell this outbreak of lawlessness on the part of a corrupt military used to the easy profits of the drug trade. General Raoul Cedras and Major Joseph Michel François, the coup leaders, supported by Port-au-Prince's elite, have mounted a public relations battle to counter the claims of Haiti's first popularly elected president. First, the military made the coup appear an uprising of enlisted men. Then their civilian allies promoted the claim that the middle class was fed up with Aristide. By exploiting his battles with the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, they quickly made Aristide's human rights record the pivotal question. This tactic had some early success with incomplete and inaccurate accounts in both the *New York Times*

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and the *Washington Post*, and it succeeded in putting some distance between Washington and the Aristide government. Allegations of human rights abuses under the Aristide government have been given wide circulation in the U.S. press, supported in part by his threat to use "Père Lebrun" (the practice of hanging a gasoline-drenched tire around someone's neck and torching it) on his opponents.

Aristide defended his human rights record on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* (October 27): "Reports that our government incited people to violence or revenge have no basis in reality. Not one political assassination occurred during our administration. Not one political prisoner was jailed. No boat filled with frightened political refugees fled Haiti for U.S. shores." The Washington Office on Haiti has summarized data published by the National Coalition for Haitian Refugees: "On a monthly basis, total violations averaged 73 under [Gen. Prosper] Avril, 59 under [Ertha] Pascal Trouillot, and 24 under Aristide." They judge this a "significant improvement" in human rights.

On his return to Haiti after a visit to the United Nations, Aristide had given a speech that was a bitter attack on Haiti's elite. Although he did not use the term "Père Lebrun," his remarks were rightly interpreted as a call for popular justice. The context for that speech, however, must be kept in mind: Aristide was told at the airport by his ministers of a possible assassination attempt awaiting him on the trip to the National Palace. Against the counsel of his closest advisors, he threatened his opponents with this particularly gruesome form of street justice from the masses if his election was not respected. He escaped the would-be assassins that night, only to be caught up in the coup a few days later. Since the coup, the abuses and death toll have steadily risen; Aristide supporters—usually city slum dwellers or rural peasants—have been rounded up, and increasingly so have priests and sisters involved in community organizing. Father Eddy Julien, priest-director of Caritas in the Diocese of Jeremie, was arrested. A number of sisters have been harassed and threatened by soldiers and police. Local cooperative organizations, peasant organizations, and base Christian communities have been the target of military attacks.

By now it is clear that in this struggle, the Haitian Catholic church is no longer the cultural-political force it was during the downfall of Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1986. During the latter half of the eighties, its radio station, Radio Soleil, was the voice of the voiceless. Now it has fallen into offering apologies for the coup while refusing to allow Aristide supporters a turn at the microphone. The station has also opposed the OAS embargo. Given the importance of radio in this largely illiterate nation, the failure of Radio Soleil to defend the poor and the democratic possibilities offered by Aristide is appalling. The bishops who oversee Radio Soleil have looked into the eye of evil and blinked. They have also lost touch with the masses. During the recent visit of an OAS delegation, the bishops refused to meet the OAS at the same time as members of the Haitian Conference of Religious and the base Christian communities.

The church has not been completely co-opted, however. There is Radio Henriquillo, a kind of "Radio Free Haiti," located in the neighboring Dominican Republic. It is beaming information into Haiti, and Aristide often speaks over its air waves. But station personnel in the Dominican Republic have been harassed and the Macoutes-Duvalierist forces in Haiti have set up an interceptor station—Radio Petjonville—to block the signal.

One church voice has not been stifled, that of Bishop Willy Romelus of Jeremie. In stinging Creole, he denounced the coup and called for the return of Aristide and democracy. Romelus has spoken over Radio Henriquillo. He refuses to speak on Radio Soleil. On the night of October 18, the army responded to his criticism the only way it knows how: The radio station in Bishop Romelus's own diocese was destroyed. The OAS meeting in Cartegena, Colombia, on November 23 between Aristide and leaders of the Haitian Senate and Chamber of Deputies ended in a stalemate. The OAS proposal to name an interim prime minister, restore Aristide to the presidency, and form a new government agreeable to the legislature was rejected by the lawmakers, apparently out of fear of the military. Meanwhile, the army remains entrenched in Haiti, hundreds of students languish in prison, and the death toll can safely be put at 1,300.

Notwithstanding the determination of Haiti's people to stand against the coup makers, the way out will not be easy. For the present, only a complete and enforced economic blockade seems to hold any hope for the restoration of Aristide and democracy. Yet the *Washington Post* (October 31), reported at face value the warning of the Haitian Chamber of Commerce and Industry that "the sanctions would provoke a 'socio-economic catastrophe' and that it would be the international community's fault." It begs credibility to hear the claims of Haiti's wealthy few that the poor will suffer. Haiti's poor have always suffered. There are good indications that a sizable portion of Aristide voters are willing to suffer through the embargo in order to bring him back. One slum dweller told a friend that he would rather a "*ti misère*" than a "*grand misère*." "I would rather have a short misery than a long one. I want Pe Titid [Père Aristide] back no matter what it takes."

JOHN P. HOGAN & BRUCE MacDONALD

John P. Hogan, who was director of Catholic Relief Services in Haiti from 1987 to 1989, has written frequently on Haiti for Commonweal. *Bruce MacDonald, a Washington-based freelance writer, has also written extensively on Haiti.*

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KISSING IN PUBLIC

DECORUM VS. LIBERATION

Newspaper and TV reports have told us recently that Chinese authorities are cracking down on public displays of affection on university campuses. Sorry, kids: you can hug your books but not your girlfriends and boyfriends.

When the American press goes beyond mere reporting of this fact and attempts analysis, it usually explains that the ban is the result of "puritanical" attitudes that prevail in the Communist party of China.

This explanation always causes visions of puritans, Communists, and Sigmund Freud to dance in my head.

I doubt the Chinese are puritans. I even doubt that the Chinese Communists are puritans. Remember, for the last few millennia China has had a culture which placed an extraordinary emphasis on decorum and good manners. Confucianism even gave propriety a religious dimension. Decorum was not just decorum; it was a way of aligning oneself with the divine, a way of putting oneself in touch with ultimate reality.

In the West we have had certain social classes in certain eras with a special attachment to the idea of good manners—the upper middle class in Victorian England, for instance. But no one in the West, not even in the best-mannered periods of our history, ever believed that propriety would put us in touch with God. At its best, decorum was nothing but decorum; it was never an aspect of religion.

The bad press the Victorians have received for the better part of the twentieth century gives some evidence of the low esteem in which we hold the culture of decorum. (It is true, Victorian gardens are making something of a comeback, but on the whole "Victorian" remains a dirty word.) We children of the modern West—that is to say, we children of Rousseau—value spontaneity, sincerity, authenticity; we despise artificiality. Like Annie Oakley in the old Irving Berlin musical, we believe in "doin' a-what comes natcherly."

The Chinese have always preferred social convention to human nature, propriety to spontaneity. It is eighty years now since the revolution commenced in China and more than forty since the Communists came to power, and in that time many things have changed, changed utterly. But a mere century is too little time to destroy the fundamental orientation of a civilization.

In short, the ban on kissing on campus has little to do with puritanism and much to do with propriety.

It is bad form to be a Freudian nowadays, since feminists have declared Freud to be a misogynist and gays and lesbians have declared him to be a homophobe. But if Freud is dead, a kind of pseudo-Freud lingers on.

It was Freud's misfortune that he had a very complicated theory—too complicated to be understood by the average nonprofessional reader. But it was his good fortune (measured in terms of fame and publishing royalties) that this complicated theory lent itself to gross but popular oversimplification. It has long been widely believed that Freud was a sexual liberationist, that he urged us to free ourselves from sexual inhibitions. Not so. True enough, he urged us not to overdo repression; but in the last analysis (excuse the pun) he was the twentieth century's most eloquent apologist for sexual repression.

Ironically, many who denounce Freud as a misogynist and homophobe nonetheless endorse what they imagine to have been his sexual liberationism. "Perhaps he didn't understand gays and women," they say, "but at least he understood the psychological danger of having sexual hang-ups." This popular sexual psychology of the pseudo-Freud has its merits, of course. If you are a young man intent on getting a series of women into bed, for instance, it is well that these young women should be disciples of the pseudo-Freud. By jumping into the sack with you they can demonstrate the soundness of their mental health; they can prove that they are not puritans.

The danger of the pseudo-Freud is that he makes it difficult for us to understand what the Chinese are up to when they tell their students not to kiss in public. We conclude they must have sexual hang-ups; they must be puritans.

The danger too is that we are unable to understand what the original Puritans were up to. They were objectionable characters in many ways, as when they cut the head off the well-mannered King Charles, who was such a model of decorum that the Chinese themselves might have admired him. And they were heroic characters in many ways, as when 30,000 of them crossed the ocean and tried to create Utopia in Massachusetts. But to imagine that any light can be thrown on either their obnoxious or their heroic qualities by thinking of them in terms of categories provided by the pseudo-Freud is absurd.

The Puritans had a strict sexual code, true; but so does virtually every society with a strong sense of community. In such societies it is felt that social interests are at stake in all areas of life, even the most intimate. There is no aspect of conduct which is a matter of indifference to the community; hence the community creates rules that govern even one's sexual conduct. In a way, sexuality is the test case: if society can regulate so naturally private a sphere as sexual conduct, then the principle has been established that society can regulate anything.

The difference between the Puritans and us is not that we feel comfortable with sexuality and they did not. (Anyone who imagines that contemporary Americans feel comfortable with sexuality has been living on the moon for the last twenty-five years.) No, the difference is that they had a strong sense of community and we do not. The sexual emancipation of the contemporary era is an index of community disintegration.

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COMPARISONS THAT HELP

APPLES, ORANGES & TEST SCORES

Just the other day Diane S. Ravitch, assistant secretary of the United States Department of Education, defended international tests comparing American schoolchildren with those of other industrialized nations. We would be foolish, she said, to disregard the results showing U.S. students lagging behind the others in mathematics and science. Business leaders and economists, alarmed at the decline in our global competitiveness, will be inclined to agree with her. Studies of the American educational system and books suggesting solutions to its problems abound. Why do others do better?

It is an interesting footnote to the discussion that in Japan—a nation in which the average student outshines ours, and perhaps our chief worry—the same question was raised some fifteen years ago, not about another nation but about another cultural group. Ruth Shiloh, a biochemist whose husband is the Israeli minister here, recalls with some bemusement that, when they were stationed in Japan, the head of Goma Books, one of the country's largest publishers, came to her with a rather amazing proposal.

There were only around 18 million Jewish people in the world, he said, and over 100 million Japanese. Yet the number of Jewish Nobel Prize winners far outnumbered the Japanese. He reasoned that there must be something in the Jewish upbringing to account for this difference and he wanted her to write a book about Jewish child-rearing for Japanese consumption. He was particularly interested in the preschool years.

Mrs. Shiloh rose to the challenge. She thought that generalizing from her own experience would be too limiting. "It was my conviction," she says, "that every ten mothers had twelve opinions." So she enlisted the help of two other women who had different backgrounds. One was the wife of the rabbi of the Jewish community, Mazal ToKayer, a Yemenite. The other was Mitzi Edelman, Brooklyn-born and married to an American engineer working in Japan.

They sat down and discussed the subject, together with a young man who was to act as their translator for the book. "We told some stories, asked some questions. The translator also had questions. It was amazing. Even with those differing backgrounds, our principles of child-rearing were the same," Ruth Shiloh said.

Their aim was to foster a love of learning. (She recalls that in the Jewish schools for toddlers throughout Eastern Europe the children's day began with a dish of almonds and raisins: "To make them think of school as a pleasant place.") The three mothers agreed that they sought to introduce curiosity, initiative, and individuality in their children. Their children were taught to appreciate differences and that differing talents had equal value: one child might be musical, another good at drawing or numbers. It was all good. Questioning was encouraged. Above all, the primary stress was on individuality, she thought.

This could not have been more different from the Japanese approach, she concludes in retrospect. Because she was a working mother, her own small son attended a Japanese preschool from the age of three to six and one-half. The emphasis there was on total compliance, she remembers. Everything was to be done the same way. Everyone had the same standards, the same ethics. There was no questioning. The teacher handed down what was to be learned. Her son was not allowed to be left-handed. "I would go to the school and reason with the teachers. 'Let him use his left hand—it is considered all right in our culture.' They would say 'Yes, Mrs. Shiloh, yes, Mrs. Shiloh.' But they continued insisting on his right hand."

Nevertheless, her son liked the school. He used to say, she remembers laughing, that he was only half-Japanese but that, when he grew up, he would be all Japanese. He was the only foreign child in the school and perhaps found security in sameness. "They encouraged mothers to come for festivals and outings. He liked to have our maid-housekeeper come because she was the same as the other mothers."

Once the boy was back in Israel the Japanese training fell away. "He used his left hand and found he could draw with ease—something he had had trouble with before." He forgot the Japanese language but his mother believes that she sees in him, now a young man, the mark of the early Japanese education. "He has more imagination than his contemporaries and a more plastic artistic sensitivity. He is more responsive to nature." These positive attributes are inculcated in Japanese learning, she thinks.

Japanese publishers can be heavy-handed in promotion. When *The Jewish Way of Child-Raising* (an approximation of the Japanese title) came out it was billed as a key to a people "with all the big money and all the big minds." The cover listed world-famous people who were, according to the promotion, products of "5,000 years of Jewish education," many of them, the author says, non-Jews like Thomas Mann. Evidently nobody quibbled. The book was a best-seller in Japan and was pirated in Korea where it had a similar success, albeit with no reward for the writers.

It is clear from this vignette that in comparing educational practice and goals different cultures do have something to learn from one another. To that extent the Department of Education is right in insisting on the value of the international comparison of test scores. But it is important that we consider the trade-offs as we try to improve our performance. The publisher of Goma Books, in a rather crude way, was trying to find out what the trade-offs were. He saw that a high standard of general achievement was reached in his country, but perhaps at the cost of outstanding individual excellence. He tried to find out why. The comparing of test scores is not enough. We have to evaluate contrasting methods of education and contrasting goals as well.

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WHO DECIDES WHAT'S SAFE?

FETAL PROTECTION IN THE WORKPLACE

FRANCIS FLAHERTY

Wisconsin physician Charles Fishburn worries about kids. A specialist in workplace health, his particular concern is fetal injury from lead. Carried to the fetus by the mother's bloodstream, this poison can induce abortions and wreak great damage to the unborn child's brain.

Twenty-five years ago, these concerns led Fishburn to Globe Union, a Milwaukee car-battery company. Battery-making entails major lead exposure—battery innards are almost all lead—and the doctor counseled the manufacturer to take steps to lower worker lead levels. Under his guidance Globe Union did so, regularly monitoring blood-lead levels; improving workplace ventilation; and furnishing respirators in high-lead areas of its factories.

In 1977 Globe Union supplemented these efforts with an official lead policy. The company would inform all women workers of childbearing age of the dangers of lead during pregnancy, and would counsel them that it probably made "good sense" not to take designated high-lead jobs in the company if a pregnancy was planned. That said, however, the choice was emphatically the woman's. "[P]rotection of the health of the unborn child is the immediate and direct responsibility of the prospective parents," said the policy. "While the medical profession and the company can support them in the exercise of this responsibility, it cannot assume it for them without simultaneously infringing their rights as persons."

Five years later this policy was shucked. Eight women workers became pregnant while maintaining high lead levels, and while there was no proof of fetal injury the scare prompted the company to adopt an exclusionary approach. The new rules said no fertile woman could assume a high-lead job. A woman was deemed fertile unless she presented a doctor's note to the contrary.

The effect was dramatic. Some women were shifted out of high-lead jobs, often to lower-paying ones in the company. Other women, rather than be transferred, chose (on their own) to be sterilized. The impact was broad too, applying nationwide to fourteen battery plants run by Johnson Controls, a large corporation that had earlier acquired Globe Union. Charges of discrimination grew louder, and in 1984 the workers' union, the UAW, sued, with the support of the ACLU and the National Organization for Women.

After nearly seven years of litigation, the Supreme Court pronounced the final judicial word on the case last March, striking down the Johnson Controls policy as illegal sex discrimination. Technically, the ruling forbids only sex-specific fetal policies; those that apply equally to fertile men and fertile women are not included in the ban. (There is some evidence that lead exposure may damage sperm, and thus the fetus, but most medical data to date focus on the dangers of maternal exposure.)

The sex-specific proviso is fairly academic; the high court decision has wide reach. It affects not only Johnson Controls, but also fifteen other large enterprises that have instituted what are now known as "fetal protection" (FP) policies. Indeed the case extends further because, in its absence, liability fears coupled with rapid advances in medical knowledge about fetal harms from alcohol, tobacco smoke, and other substances would have spurred many more FP policies for tens of millions of working women.

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Basically, the Supreme Court held that Title VII—the federal law that forbids discrimination in the workplace due to race, sex, religion, and the like—leaves to the working mother all decisions about her unborn child. "It is no more appropriate for the courts than it is for individual employers to decide whether a women's reproductive role is more important to herself and her family than her economic role," wrote Justice Harry Blackmun for the majority. "Congress has left this choice to the woman...."

The Court did not ignore the issue of fetal health. "No one can disregard the possibility of injury to future children," Justice Blackmun declared; it is a matter of "deep social concern." But because the Court is a law-interpreter rather than a law-maker, it must accede to "the plain language and history" of Title VII as enacted by Congress, he said. If Congress wants a different result, it need only amend the statute.

Whatever the courts' limited role, there are plenty of good reasons to keep both companies and the state out of the business of supervising women and their babies. The Supreme Court itself pointed out the major one: "Concern for a woman's existing or potential offspring historically has been the excuse for denying women equal employment opportunities."

Convenient proof comes from the very same Court, in a 1908 ruling over an Oregon law prohibiting any woman from working in a factory or laundry more than ten hours a day. As ostensibly benign as the Johnson Controls FP policy, this law was valid because "woman's physical structure" put her "at a disadvantage in the struggle for subsistence," Justice Brewer explained. This "inherent difference between the sexes" permits different legislative treatment of them, he concluded, adding for good measure that "woman has always been dependent upon man" anyway.

Of course, with their history of sweatshops and child labor, companies are particularly suspect guardians of women's weal. Nor need one travel to 1908 to find proof. In mid-July, for example, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reached a $66 million settlement with AT&T for discriminating against 13,000 pregnant employees as recently as the late 1970s. In sharp contrast with its treatment of nonpregnancy disabilities, the telecommunications giant forced these pregnant workers to take unpaid maternity leave early in the third trimester, with no guarantees of a job upon return and little seniority credit. While Title VII and attendant amendments have changed these once-common practices, women's rights advocates aver that pregnancy prejudice continues strongly in today's workplace.

Given this history, it is hardly surprising that feminists fought the Johnson Controls FP policy. If employers gain a say-so on fetal health, feminists fear, women's independence may be in peril.

But placing reproductive control in women's hands does more than keep it out of state or corporate clutches. Such control is a woman's right, a parental right, a private family matter. Personal autonomy is its own justification; rights don't need reasons. Of course, there are obvious reasons why parents should be the primary guardians of their kids. Though tragic exceptions confront us daily in the headlines, who is more likely than parents to have their children's interests at heart? Profit-maximizing corporations? State bureaucracies?

But what about the baby? What about those tragic headlines? There are bad parents. And poverty can draw even well-meaning ones into dangerous jobs. Is the Supreme Court completely consigning an unborn child's health to such parents? Precisely so, said Justice Byron White in his concurrence. "The Court's narrow interpretation...means that an employer cannot exclude even pregnant women from an environment highly toxic to their fetuses...." Are there any supplemental safeguards our society can offer its unborn children? And do feminist principles or other social goals get tangled up in these safety nets?

There are such safeguards; a main one is regulatory. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is charged with such issues as lead exposure on the job and, in fact, has promulgated specific rules on lead. Nevertheless, many companies like Johnson Controls opt to exceed OSHA standards, out of fear of liability, perhaps, or out of sincere doubt about the adequacy of OSHA's lead rules. (Johnson Controls, for instance, would certainly quarrel with OSHA's 1978 finding that "there is no basis whatsoever for the claim that women of childbearing age should be excluded from the workplace in order to protect the fetus or the course of pregnancy.")

Be that as it may, a worker-friendly regulatory agency that has issued rules with bite and enforces them conscientiously is one of the best safeguards for society's unborn. If regulators do their job right, poor, prospective parents won't have to make a Hobson's choice between decent jobs and healthy kids. An economy that gives the poor a choice of reasonably safe jobs with reasonable compensation wouldn't hurt either.

Second, Congress can take up Justice Blackmun's offer and amend Title VII to allow employers to use fetal safety as a factor in employment decisions. Such an amendment must be sharply drawn—limited to lead?—to assuage feminist fears of growing corporate control of women workers. Even the narrowest version may be politically doomed, and maybe rightly so.

A final check is found in the developing legal doctrine on prenatal harms. Forty states now allow persons to sue for injuries sustained *in utero*. A person can seek damages from the drunken driver who hit and injured himself and his then-pregnant mother, for example. There are many subsidiary rules to the new doctrine but, like all legal doctrines, its social effect is to deter damaging behavior through the threat of civil liability. (Indeed, fear of such liability doubtless has played a major role in FP policies at Johnson Controls and other companies.)

Moreover, welfare officials and courts are now treating fetal abuse like child abuse. In a typical case in the last week of August, for instance, a Connecticut appeals court ruled that cocaine use during pregnancy constituted child abuse and thereupon terminated the offender's parental rights. In an AP news report, Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal voiced the ruling's broad significance. "There is no reason," he said, "that

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this...couldn't be applied to alcohol abuse or other potential reasons for termination of parental rights."

One cannot say how the future will shape this inchoate doctrine. But who knows? There may come a time when a pregnant woman, falling-down drunk after hours at a tavern, will as surely lose custody of her unborn child as would a parent who severely beats his toddler.

Conscientious regulation, Title VII amendments, and emerging legal trends: these are some possible safeguards for the fetus in addition to parental care. No system of vigilance is perfect; the best a society can do is to fashion as good a mix as it can consistent with its other goals and needs. For fetal protection, that means parents as the primary guardians of fetal health, with the state playing an important supporting role through workplace regulation and the development of legal doctrines.

But the corporation—although it can play pivotal technical and informational roles with respect to workplace hazards—must be deprived of any but the most ministerial authority over fetal health. Past sexist practices; the biases inherent in profit-making institutions; and the peculiar power imbalances of the employer-employee relationship—all strongly counsel against giving bosses anything approaching discretion in this area. Johnson Controls had it right the first time.

SCREEN

URBAN JUNGLES

'CITY OF HOPE' & 'MONEY'

When he reviewed *Odd Man Out* and *Great Expectations* upon their American release in 1947, James Agee wrote that he "enjoyed *Great Expectations* more than Carol Reed's *Odd Man Out*, but I was more interested in Reed's film and liked it more." Agee went on to justify this seemingly contradictory statement by noting that the David Lean adaptation of Dickens was a skilled "translation" rather than an inspired "transfiguration" and that it failed to "run the risks that are always run when primary creative intelligence rather than the best that good taste can do is turned loose on the screen."

Agee's distinctions can be echoed in regard to two new movies that examine the economic and social flaws in the way Americans live now: Norman Jewison's glib, shrewd, safeplaying, and immensely enjoyable *Other People's Money* and John Sayles's admirable but trying *City of Hope*.

City of Hope isn't trying because its vision of this country is bleak. Indeed, my heart goes out to Sayles for being so wide-ranging in his examination of our ills. Setting his story in a medium-sized city that seems to be a kind of compressed New York, this novelist turned cineast tries to show how the problems of whites and blacks, old and young, uncomfortably comfortable middle class and desperately workless working class are all bound

"Here's your money, Sir, and I'm sure you came by it honestly."

together. If a basically decent white contractor-landlord yields to the pressure of a corrupt city hall and torches a poor black housing project that the venal mayor wants to turn into a condo complex, then the basically decent black councilman trying to help the victims of the arson will first establish his militant credentials by helping to frame a decent white teacher for molesting two black youths who actually roughed up the teacher. White corruption spurs black corruption. The injustice done to the poor breeds injustice to the middle class. Sayles's intricately structured script portrays the "city of hope" as a house of cards in collapse.

And, to his great credit, Sayles has created a style that perfectly mirrors his theme. Its basic unit is the lengthy tracking shot that stays on one set of characters until they walk out of the frame and another set of characters with different but related problems walk into it or are literally *tracked* down by the moving, hunting camera. Different characters with different problems, all trapped within the same urban corruption, are also all trapped within the same cinematic rectangle.

But Sayles wears out his welcome with even the most sympathetic moviegoer by packing too much into his story. Besides the arson and the teacher's victimization, Sayles dramatizes (or at least sketches) the anomie of Nick, the contractor's son, the councilman's struggle to secure better schooling for his community's children, the indignities inflicted by and on overworked cops, the machinations of the city's D.A., who has political ambitions, the affair between Nick and a policeman's ex-wife, the councilman's happy but tested marriage, the conflict between militant black Muslims and black liberals, and—believe me—there's more, more, more! Sayles does manage to etch some of these situations vividly but at least half of them aren't so much dramatized as semaphored. Just when you're beginning to get interested in one set of characters, the writer-director seems to murmur from behind the camera, "Let's move it, kids! We've got a caseload backed up to the last Republican administration."

Sayles the filmmaker seems to listen to every single complaint

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harbored by Sayles the concerned citizen. I admire Concerned Citizen Sayles and share his concerns. But he's got to give filmmaker Sayles a break so that the latter can take a few deep breaths, focus his attention on those problems and characters he really understands, and then create a drama that has depth as well as scope.

On the basis of its subject matter—the struggle of an old-line New England manufacturing company to avoid a hostile takeover by a Wall Street raider and the way that struggle is waged financially, legally, and even erotically between the raider (Danny DeVito) and the company's lawyer (Penelope Anne Miller)—you might guess that *Other People's Money* equals *City of Hope* in ambition, scope, and social inquiry.

You would guess wrong. This movie is slick entertainment of a fairly high order. Though some of the legal-financial maneuvering is sharply observed and the final contending appeals to the stockholders by DeVito and Gregory Peck (as the company's scion) make for stirring oratory, the real focus of this movie is on the sexual contest between the beautiful lawyer and the Wall Street hustler. In other words, *Other People's Money* is a romance, a seriocomic love story merely underpinned by social concerns. It's both topical and old-fashioned.

It works. And it works mainly because of two shrewd strategies employed by director Norman Jewison and scriptwriter Alvin Sargent (adapting Jerry Sterner's play) and executed *con brio* by DeVito and Miller.

First, the physical disparity between the erotic duelists. Miller is sleek and fine-boned. DeVito is...well, you've seen DeVito. Neither director nor players try to mitigate this beauty-and-the-beast pairing. In fact, they emphasize it in as many ways as they can with extreme close-ups of the two kissing, with camera angles that emphasize the way the woman towers over the man and, most of all, in sheer emphasis through the acting, on how much DeVito lusts for Miller and how aware Miller is of the power she has over DeVito because of his short ugly man's yearning for a woman who, under normal circumstances, wouldn't even notice him, much less respond to him.

Second, and even more important: neither of the duelists is deceitful or even tricky in the sexual sparring. This starkly contrasts with their financial-legal maneuvering that is certainly high-handed and in which neither gives quarter to the other. But though she doesn't hesitate to drive up the price of the stock he wants to buy and he doesn't scruple to bribe a traitor in her client's ranks, each is fair to the other when it comes to using eros as a weapon. When the lawyer threatens to turn over her case to some colleague unless DeVito grants her a certain legal respite, he feels no resentment in giving way, and she feels no guilt about her manipulation of him. His yielding is an open tribute to her beauty, and her willingness to use his infatuation is her way of acknowledging his admiration. Corporate settings notwithstanding, *Other People's Money* portrays courtly love in a twentieth-century permutation. He sighs and moans and guffaws when she hoodwinks him. She denounces him as an agent of capitalistic chaos, schemes to wreck his plans, but doesn't hold herself aloof from him. As long as she is willing to battle him, she remains in his view and that is, for the moment, all he wants. He is her pinstriped, limousine-transported knight. She is his loophole-hunting, computer-tapping *belle dame sans merci*.

None of it would work if the actors didn't deliver, but they do. Danny DeVito's entire previous career has been a preparation for this role and he seizes his moment like Richard III seizing the crown. Penelope Ann Miller is still a novice actor (though an exceedingly promising one), but hers is a good role for a novice to play. Her occasional awkwardness of movement and uncertainty of how to use her hands, lends her a mild gawkiness that nicely contrasts with the cocksure aggression of her role. And, in close-ups, she is secure and commanding.

In the star-billed but essentially supporting role of the manufacturer, Gregory Peck is wonderful. He's never been a favorite actor of mine because he has always seemed less a human being than a walking, breathing advertisement for Rotary International. (Why didn't the Democrats run Peck against Ronald Reagan?) But he's aged magnificently and seems to have grown into the middle-class grandeur he's always aspired to. And his expert delivery of his final appeal to the stockholders reminded me that Peck first won acclaim as a stage actor; he still has a good stage artist's command of volume, pause, and inflection.

Norman Jewison sends every element in the script, good or bad, whizzing by the viewer. *Other People's Money* is less a work of art than a wonderfully wrapped package full of high-calorie goodies. But, then again, isn't the manufacture of confectionery at least a minor art as well as a business?

RICHARD ALLEVA

DANCE

GO WEST, YOUNG DANCER

BALLET WEST COMES EAST

It's now something of a cliché to say that dance in New York has fallen on hard times. Citing skyrocketing rents in Manhattan, diminishing funds from grant sources, and living situations that dancers are increasingly unwilling to put up with, many people conclude that the dance boom of the '70s and '80s is over. But the week-long appearance by Salt Lake City's Ballet West at the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., (October 8-13) made clear that dance in unlikely places like Utah is doing just fine, and that when it tours back East it can hold its own with the local products.

Ballet West burst on the national scene in the 1980s, with the production by then-director Bruce Marks of *Abdallah*, a "lost" ballet of the great nineteenth-century Danish master, Auguste Bournonville (1805-79). The production was so successful that it was taken over by the Royal Danish Ballet, the company that has kept Bournonville's heritage alive. For all the recent attention, however, Ballet West is not a new company. It was founded in 1951 by William Christensen and Utah arts' patroness Glenn

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Walker Wallace. Along with his brothers, Lew and Harold, Christensen had established the San Francisco Ballet in 1937, the oldest ballet company in the United States.

Ballet West's programs at the Kennedy Center made clear that the company, now under the direction of John Hart, has polished this heritage to a new luster. In fact, the opening night program seemed designed to astonish everyone with the breadth of this company's capabilities. The choreography ranged from the delicate, Petipa-inspired classicism of George Balanchine's (1904-83) Divertimento No. 15 to the European angst of John Neumeier's *The Age of Anxiety*, commissioned by the Kennedy Center and presented here as a world premiere. The program closed with the spirited romp of Peter Anastos's *The Gilded Bat*, with sets and costumes by Edward Gorey.

Gorey is known to millions as the illustrator whose delightfully droopy Victorian maidens and detectives are seen with the credits for the PBS "Mystery" series. The ballet is based on his picture book of the same title about a vacuous ballerina who meets a sad end at the height of her fame. Transferred to the stage, it serves as a frame for a series of ballet take-offs, Peter Anastos's stock in trade from his days at the men's parody ballet troupe popularly known as the "Trocs." The narration, provided by Hart himself from an easy chair in best "Masterpiece Theatre" style, ties the vignettes together with bits of Gorey's tale.

The Gilded Bat is chock-a-block with references to dance history. The hapless heroine does dreary *Swan Lake* spin-offs in the provinces, achieves fame in a kind of cross between Bournonville's *La Sylphide* and Jerome Robbins's *The Cage* (she plays a crazed insect that attacks a pair of lovers), and catches the public's interest in a polar version of Fokine's *Firebird*, entitled *L'Oiseau de Glace*, The Ice Bird. (She is hunted not by a Russian prince, but by a band of men wearing fuzzy parkas in neon colors and clunking around the stage in snowshoes.)

References to other ballets were also close at hand in the evening's headliner ballet, Neumeier's *Age of Anxiety*. It was set to Bernstein's symphony of the same name, itself inspired by W.H. Auden's celebrated poem. The opening was reminiscent of that most famous of Bernstein/Robbins ballets, *Fancy Free*, with three men and a woman at a bar (the stunning sets and costumes were by Zack Brown). Here, however, instead of happy-go-lucky sailors from the '40s, we had angst-ridden yuppies from the '50s (or was it the '90s). This sort of thing is more popular in Germany, where the American-born Neumeier heads the Hamburg Ballet, than it is in the U.S. Even the movement seemed derivative: bad Modern Dance, involving murky relationships between former selves (half-dressed dancers who doubled the barflies) and a strangely erotic "father" figure, all of it involving much writhing about. A choreographic disappointment, this piece never approached the level of Paul Taylor's brilliant *Company B*, a masterful work about loneliness and longing set to music of the Andrews Sisters which premiered this summer with the Houston Ballet.

For the engagement's second program, the Salt Lake company offered Andre Prokovsky's modern full-length *Anna Karenina*,

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set to a Tchaikovsky-pastiche score. Fitfully compelling, the piece consisted largely of a series of lengthy pas de deux for Anna and her adulterous lover, Vronksy. Pamela Robinson's Anna was suitably passionate, though Raymond Van Mason's Vronsky seemed more like a sneering, pretty boy than a dashing officer for whom Anna would sacrifice so much. The stage effects included a stunning locomotive that surges out of the darkness of the Russian night.

The dancing for the entire engagement was solid to good, with the exception of the rocky and imprecise beginning of the opening-night Balanchine. The conception of that piece was too lyrical and dramatized for eyes raised on the New York City Ballet's more athletic style. Of course, this lyricism of approach to Balanchine is quite comprehensible in the context of director John Hart's avowed predilection for dramatic or story ballets. Moreover, it is not inconsistent with Balanchine's Petipan prototypes. Even Marius Petipa's (1822-1910) most abstract sequences appeared in the context of dramatic ballets, and were danced by men and women in character. For whatever abstraction of movement was lost in the Ballet West's interpretation, therefore, the gain was in the sense of immediacy and human involvement it produced. Indeed, it may be that the greatest strength of Ballet West is the sense the company conveys of just this involvement: the dancers with the dance, with each other, and finally with the audience. BRUCE FLEMING

Bruce Fleming is an associate professor of English at the United States Naval Academy and was the 1990 Dance Critics Association Fellow.

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STAGE

THE MUSIC OF MEMORY

'DANCING' & 'BORROWED TIME'

"In memory everything seems to happen to music," says Tom Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*. Such is the case with Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*, but the music is in this case is not Tom's "fiddle in the wings" but Irish dances and 1930s' popular songs. They burst intermittently from the sometimes working radio (Marconi, as the Mundy sisters call it), the first such instrument to find its way into the Mundy home outside Ballybeg, the County Donegal setting for so many of Friel's plays. Michael, who is to Friel as Tom is to Tennessee Williams, has a lyric speech at the end of the play recalling "a dream music that is both heard and imagined," but he goes Tom one better for "when I remember it, I think of it as dancing."

Dancing at Lughnasa, which comes from Dublin and London trailing clouds of glory, looks as though it is going to be a solid Broadway hit. That might at first seem surprising since, as so often in Friel's plays, it is about loss and dissolution. The Mundy family is about to fall apart in this summer of 1936. Kate, the oldest sister, a school teacher who tries to hold the family together (religious and social propriety is her glue), loses her job because brother Jack, a priest, has been invalided home after years at a leper colony in Uganda, not for his health's sake but because he has gone native. Agnes and the slightly retarded Rose learn that a new factory will replace their cottage industry—the making of hand-knitted gloves—eventually triggering their departure from Ballybeg. Gerry, Michael's father, wanders in and out, his feckless Welsh charm creating tensions among the women, particularly between Chris, Michael's mother, and Aggie. Michael's memory catches the Mundy sisters at the moment of disruption, but as the grown man remembers what the boy of seven saw they are still a functioning group. The kitchen is shot through with love and comfort, resentment and rebellion—it is a family.

The strength of the production lies with the five actresses (three of whom have been with *Lughnasa* since the Dublin opening in 1990), who play together so effectively that they not only embody the characters but make them seem—for the moment at least—inseparable. Beyond the pleasure of performance, the audience is given the cozening comfort of memory which, as Williams said in his notes to *Menagerie*, "takes a lot of poetic license." Friel would seem to agree. The painful events of that summer, clouded by the long look back, allow Michael/Friel at once to warm and chill the audience. It is Michael's remembered dancing music that does the warming. Aggie (Brid Brennan) and Gerry (Robert Gwilym) do a marvelous dance to "Anything Goes," and he and Chris (Catherine Byrne) move romantically through "Dancing in the Dark." The more important if less elegant dance to music from Marconi comes at the end of the first act when a vigorous Irish tune pulls first one, then another of the sisters into a mad dance until finally Kate (Rosaleen Linehan) breaks out, joining the others in a moment that is at once a cry of joy and a revolution against the rigidities and the poverty that smother them. This is a real Lughnasa dance, for Lughnasa is a harvest festival with its roots in pre-Christian Ireland which

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the savages in the hills, as Kate calls her more unbuttoned neighbors, celebrate with dance and drink and animal sacrifice. This allies the homage to the pagan god Lugh with the African festival of the first yam—three days of nonstop dancing by Father Jack's leper friends—which the priest describes so eloquently that he makes clear the distance he has moved from his Christian calling. In a profile in the *New York Times Magazine* (September 29), Friel suggests that the play is "about the necessity for paganism," but the thematic importance of all those dancing feet, on stage or simply described, gives way to the theatrical need to bathe the Mundy sisters ("those five brave Glenties women," Friel's mother and aunts, from whom the characters derive) in a retrospective embrace of memory.

Memory omits and exaggerates, Williams says, because it "is seated predominantly in the heart." That is where *Dancing in Lughnasa* is seated, which is what touches audiences. I could do without much of the grown Michael's commentary (the adult explainer is the curse of the memory play), but while the Mundy sisters are on stage I am as susceptible as the next person. And I can't seem to stop dancing to "Anything Goes."

Not long after the remembered Mundy summer, in the unreal real world of Broadway, an amiably sentimental comedy opened. Paul Osborn's *On Borrowed Time*, an adaptation of Lawrence E. Watkin's novel, lacks the bite of his *Morning's at Seven*, and it creaks a little these days as it sets up coming scenes and sets them up again and still again as though audiences were not very bright. Even so, there is some residual charm to Gramps's trapping death up the tree so that he can stick around and protect his grandson from the clutches of his greedy, do-goody Aunt Demetria, and to the defeat/triumph of an ending in which the principals die happily. I assume, however, that it was not these tepid virtues that led to the revival at the Circle in the Square. George C. Scott, who directed the production, was presumably enticed by the juicy role of Gramps. The Gramps I remember fondly is Lionel Barrymore in the 1939 movie, and if there was ever an actor with more calculated ties and quirks than Barrymore I cannot recall him. Scott lives in Barrymore's neighborhood. He twinkles, he grimaces, he hesitates slyly, he pauses naughtily. He is a pleasure to watch, but his Gramps is more a collection of actor's tricks than a real character. Poor Nathan Lane, who lacks the built-in suavity of Sir Cedric Hardwicke, the movie's Mr. Brink, is given occasional outbursts—hardly what one would expect of Osborn's death figure—but he and the rest of the cartoon characters are upstaged by Gramps. Only Teresa Wright as Granny is more character than actress playing a character. The Mundy sisters loved American music, but there is a comic toughness to them that makes me doubt that they would have responded well to *On Borrowed Time*, had a road company come through Ballybeg; and certainly Kate, so appalled by the paganizing of Father Jack, would not have approved of the secular softness of an afterlife where "the woodbine twineth." Yet, audiences who take *On Borrowed Time* with a Mundy grain of salt may still find bits of it to their taste.

GERALD WEALES

Dixie Patridge

Cold: A Returning

(for J.)

Locust trees are gaunt along the ditchbank,
pines windbreak on the east. Snow
whites-out the place a house should be. Here
you grew up in two stories
of a family hotel moved from Sterling
in the '40s, its straight storefront
like the saloon of an old Western.

The Idaho wind between buttes
flattens our speech out through empty fields
toward the black volcanic desert,
hardened magma in broken swells
underneath the snow. We've come miles
for this view. Fences down,
we can't be sure of exact spots:
house, barn, coal chute.
A low whistle slants in the wind—
a water pipe askew you can't connect
to anything.

Two decades and you try to come back,
back through that blizzard of '68
veiling your father's cancer,
grief snowbound for days
awaiting burial. Back through all
the Idaho winters since the thousand miles
of ice we drove for his last hours.

You speak of our son's amazement
last winter when he turned twelve:
moving his beehive to higher ground
as the frozen river broke,
he watched a few hibernating bees
stir and fly out. Three seconds
in that air and they fell
solid to the ground.

The wind dies, uncovering the long silence.
Our boots leave the only tracks
in the side-road named too late
for your family who farmed here, the sky
a flat ice pond, our words spare—
tight beads white as our breath.

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Critics' choices for Christmas

Molly Finn

MOLLY FINN, *a New Yorker, is the author of three cookbooks. A musician, she sings with* Amici Musicale. *When not singing, she's reading.*

I'm getting used to hearing friends say "I hardly ever read fiction any more" with a little of the same smugness that goes with "I've just about lost my taste for beef." Do they speak out of the preposterous notion that it's frivolous to read novels, that "serious books" about "important problems" put us in closer touch with what matters? There's nothing like a novel to make us look at ourselves, friends, lovers, families, acquaintances, even at public figures, with a fresh eye. In the words of the protagonist of Paul Auster's latest novel, *The Music of Chance* (Viking, $18.95, 217 pp.), "Once a man begins to recognize himself in another, he can no longer look on that person as a stranger. Like it or not, a bond is formed."

It's hard to choose from among the many fine small-scale novels I've read recently, so different from each other and, like pieces of chamber music, all subtle and low-keyed explorations of intricate and intimate thematic material. *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro (Vintage, $9.95, 245 pp.) is a wry and moving portrait of an aging English butler as he looks back over his life of service and forward to what remains for him. For the first time he allows himself to consider the possibility that the master he served so selflessly was something less than a great gentleman and a great political figure—that he may in fact have been self-important and have done great harm. This nagging suspicion forces the butler to reconsider the values to which he has dedicated his professional and personal life. This haunting book may help us to take a long look at how and where self-deception lurks.

In *Sleeping Arrangements* (Knopf, $18.95, 195 pp.), Laura Cunningham's heroine (it has to be herself) is orphaned, then brought up in a Bronx apartment by two extremely eccentric uncles and a demented grandmother. All the serious stuff about love, responsibility, faithfulness is embedded in a hilarious narrative, making one marvel at how a writer can make what should be a heartbreaking story light and funny without trivializing it.

Wartime Lies by Louis Begley (Knopf, $19, 198 pp.), (which must also be autobiographical), is a study of hell seen through the eyes of a Polish Jewish child during World War II. In low-key, almost monotone prose this author's variation on a well-known but always shocking theme demonstrates how lying saved the narrator's life and left him, at the end of the war, in dancing school, wearing brown tweed knickers and holding the "deliciously moist" hands of a pink-faced, flaxen-haired doll, still lying to avoid the Polish pogroms. In an epilogue, the narrator, now grown up, is described as deformed by lying, "...changed inside forever, like a beaten dog, and gods will not cure that. He has no good deeds to look back upon."

A neighbor with whom I trade books passed *Wartime Lies* on to me; it is the first Holocaust book she has read and it will lead her to others. The next book I give her will be *Maus, A Survivor's Tale*, by Art Spiegelman (Pantheon, $12, 159 pp.), a book I resisted for a while because it was so offensive even to think of a comic book about the Holocaust. But *Maus* is extraordinary, combining the kind of intimacy found in Anne Frank's diary with the graphic power and drama of a Kathe Kollwitz woodcut or even one of Goya's "The Disasters of War" plates. The book's epigraph is a quotation from Hitler: "The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human." In this comic book, the Jews are mice, the Nazis are cats, the others—Poles and other non-Jews and non-Nazis—are pigs. One of the mice, a troubled thirty-year-old cartoonist/writer, interviews his old, ailing survivor father, now living in Queens. As the two bicker their way through their emotionally charged dialogues, the history of the Spiegelman family—from their comfortable middle-class life in Poland in the mid-1930s to the gates of Auschwitz in 1944—unfolds. The sequel, *Maus, A Survivor's Tale, II: And Here My Troubles Began*, has just been published (Pantheon, $18, 136 pp.).

Two books that are not novels give a comparably intimate insight into lives we might not otherwise glimpse. Although unfortunately both are seriously flawed, each is valuable for the vivid and concrete knowledge it gives us of two frequently misunderstood disabilities. *Darkness Visible* (Random House, $15.95, 84 pp.), William Styron's account of his bout of major depression, is nearly ruined by self-indulgent, melodramatic writing, but the end teaches us to distinguish this horrible illness from "feeling depressed" or "blue."

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An important message of this book, and one we can extend beyond its particular scope: Be there. Your presence, concern, and caring are part of the cure, whatever the sickness.

Seeing Voices (University of California Press, $17.95, 180 pp.), subtitled *A Journey into the World of the Deaf*, consists of three essays by Oliver Sacks. His lively style and bubbling curiosity immediately draw the reader into the subject, but the book's clumsy editing almost drove this reader to cast it aside in disgust. Instead of rewriting the essays, which originally appeared in the *New York Review of Books*, the author simply put all his second thoughts into extended footnotes. However, even the footnotes are interesting, and Sacks's gift to the persistent reader is a picture of a complex, unfamiliar subculture with a unique language and a growing sense of power in a hearing world.

Robert Coles

ROBERT COLES, *a Pulitzer Prize winner, is the author of many books, including the acclaimed* Children of Crisis *series. His most recent book is* The Spiritual Life of Children *(Houghton Mifflin). He teaches and practices psychiatry at Harvard University.*

We continue to struggle as a nation with the matter of race—the fears, the distrust, the outright hate that some of us inspire in others of us. Millions of Americans live well outside the pale, so to speak—lives of vulnerability and jeopardy in a nation that is the world's richest and strongest. Three books published this year ought to keep readers alert to this central aspect of our social, economic, political life. Alex Kotlowitz's *There Are No Children Here* (Doubleday, $21.95, 324 pp.) introduces two black boys who are growing up in a Chicago ghetto. The author is a skilled reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, and he first published part of what would become a book in the pages of that influential newspaper. I know of no better way to learn of what it means to be born black and poor in America, then by paying close heed to Lafayette and Pharoah Rivers, two brothers whose lives, as we learn of them in this book, ought to give us plenty of pause.

Another important book on the same subject is Nicholas Lemann's *The Promised Land* (Knopf, $24.95, 355 pp.). He, too, is a wonderfully careful, determined, resourceful journalist, and he has reminded us of an entire people's twentieth century fate—the migration of the blacks from the Mississippi Delta up toward "the promised land," and of course, the disappointments and sorrows and suffering which accompanied that trek north. We are offered a rich mix of historical and cultural analysis, all rendered through stories of particular men, women, children.

Finally, Melissa Fay Greene's *Praying for Sheetrock* (Addison-Wesley, $21.99, 337 pp.) introduces us, yet again, to the rural South as the homeland of black people—in this case, McIntosh County, Georgia. There, as elsewhere, blacks and whites have eyed each other with grave doubt and suspicion; there, as elsewhere, in this second half of the twentieth century, members of the two races have struggled hard with each other—and Greene's account of that struggle is a triumph of the literary-documentary tradition, a kind of social history that commands the reader's intense and grateful scrutiny.

On a somewhat different tack, I much recommend Stephen Mitchell's *The Gospel According to Jesus* (HarperCollins, $23, 310 pp.). Mitchell is a distinguished translator and poet; he is also a person of broad and deep spiritual sensibility, and this book reveals to good effect the personal qualities just mentioned. Here is Jesus the great teacher and healer, the passionate pilgrim and moralist, the prophet who dared challenge all sorts of "principalities and powers"; and yes, the Jesus who surely has made any number of religious authorities as nervous and worried as can be, hence the way he has been taken over by translators, interpreters, academics of various kinds, ecclesiastical big-shots, and theologians. Mr. Mitchell restores the lovely, fiery, utterly brave and unique voice (and manner, and point of view) of Jesus to us—and the result is a real gift, a blessing, even (one dares think) a moment of grace.

John B. Judis

JOHN B. JUDIS *is the author of* William F. Buckley, Jr.: Patron Saint of the Conservatives *(Touchstone paperback, 1990). He is a contributing editor of the* New Republic *and a Washington correspondent of* In These Times. *His new book,* Grand Illusion: Critics and Champions of the American Century, *will be published next year by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.*

I read too many old books and not enough new ones to compile a credible list of this year's best books, so let me include some books from 1990 as well and add the qualification that if a worthy book is missing from my list, it may be because I haven't read it.

My two favorite political books from this year's crop are Thomas and Mary Edsall's *Chain Reaction* (Norton, $22.95, 339 pp.)—on the role of race in American politics—and Lou Cannon's biography of Ronald Reagan (*President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, Simon and Schuster, $24.95, 752 pp.). The Edsalls are deliberate, dogged, often repetitious, but also bold and authoritative. Cannon has now written three books on Reagan, and this is his best and the best. Also worth reading are E.J. Dionne's *Why Americans Hate Politics* (Simon and Schuster, $22.95, 430 pp.) and three books from last year—Sidney Blumenthal's *Pledging Allegiance* (HarperCollins, $22.95, 386 pp.), Jim Sleeper's *The Closest of Strangers* (Norton, $21.95, 346 pp.) and Theodore Marmor, Jerry Mashaw, and Philip Harvey's *America's Misunderstood Welfare State* (Basic Books, $22.95, 268 pp.).

I've spent this year reading about foreign policy for a book I've written (see next year's best!). Warren Kimball's book on Franklin Roosevelt's wartime diplomacy, *The Juggler* (Princeton, $19.95, 304 pp.), is excellent—suggesting that Roosevelt might have avoided the shoals of the cold war. David Callahan's biography of Paul Nitze, *Dangerous Capabilities* (HarperCollins, $24.95, 572 pp.), is outstanding. Callahan began this book as an undergraduate thesis, but easily bests veteran *Time* correspondent Strobe Talbott's Nitze book

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and many of the current academic biographies of the "wise men." Robert Kaiser's *Why Gorbachev Happened* (Simon and Schuster, $24.95, 476 pp.) has the clearest explanations of U.S.-Soviet relations during the Reagan era. Daniel P. Moynihan's *The Law of Nations* (Harvard, $22.50, 211 pp.) is eminently worth reading—Moynihan is far ahead of his colleagues.

Since 1988, when Clyde Prestowitz's *Trading Places* (Basic Books) appeared, there has been at least one outstanding book on U.S.-Japan relations each year. This year, Robert Angel's *Explaining Economic Policy Failure: Japan in the 1969-71 International Monetary Crisis* (Columbia University Press, $37.50, 333 pp.) gets the nod. Angel challenges the prevailing view of the Nixon "shocks"—arguing that Japan's palsied policymaking precipitated Nixon's harsh reprisals. Angel's book perfectly complements Karel von Wolferen's *The Enigma of Japanese Power*—my favorite from 1989.

As a Washington correspondent, I read my share of monographs and hearings, and some are better than the books found in Crown or Walden. Every year, Washington's Economic Policy Institute publishes outstanding monographs, but above all, I would recommend its annual *The State of Working America* (M.E. Sharpe, $14.95, 315 pp.), by Lawrence Mishel and David M. Frankel, which contains useful statistics. This year, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations published hearings on "Relations in a Multipolar World" (part 1), which included a brilliant foreword by Moynihan and outstanding testimony by University of California political scientist Kenneth Waltz. It may be the best "book" published this year on American foreign policy. Get it at your local government printing office.

Thomas Swick

THOMAS SWICK, *travel editor of the* Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel, *is the author of* Unquiet Days: At Home in Poland, *recently published by Ticknor and Fields.*

If you are like me, and someone asks you to look back over the books you have read in the past year, picking out the best, you will be most awed by the prodigious number you haven't read. In fact, like the proverbial angler in the cartoon, I find it tempting to talk about the ones that got away. Brian Boyd's two-volume biography of Vladimir Nabokov (Princeton University Press) comes quickly to mind. To compensate for missing out on so many books—or, as I prefer to think of it, postponing the pleasure—I do keep tabs on their appearance. Chances are if someone asks me if I have read a new book, my honest reply will be: "No, but I read the review."

Because of my work, I read a lot of travel books, often while traveling. Others may bemoan the tedium of long-distance flights, but I delight in the rare gift of several uninterrupted hours to get lost in the pages of a book.

Actually, I began the year not in the air but on the sea, sailing the cruise ship *Norway* during the first week of the Gulf War and spending long hours on the deck reading Freya Stark. My copies of *East Is West* and *Beyond Euphrates* are both hardbound from the London publisher John Murray, but many of Stark's works have recently been reprinted here in paperback. Though she wrote a half a century ago, there is still no better literary source for understanding the intricacies of the Arab world.

Later in the year, going to the Black Hills of South Dakota, I read *Great Plains* by Ian Frazier (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $17.95, 282 pp.). A staff writer for the *New Yorker*, Frazier breaks with the magazine's dispassionate tone and fills the first page of his book exclusively with sentences that end in exclamation marks. Though you could argue that this is true to form, that only a *New Yorker* writer could rhapsodize over "fields of wheat and milo and sudan grass and flax and alfalfa and nothing!" (But his way of doing it, obviously, is not John McPhee's.) At times he comes across as a bit too glib, but his exuberant, free-flowing prose not only captures but in a way replicates the vast, slowly emptying middle of America that he loves.

Before a more recent trip to the French Alps—getting ready for the Winter Olympics—I read *A Life of Her Own: A Countrywoman in Twentieth Century France*, by Emilie Carles (Rutgers University Press, $19.95, 264 pp.). Carles grew up in a small village in Dauphine, "the Appalachia of France" before its postwar transformation into a skier's paradise. She was no stylist, but her story stands on its own: One of six children, she struggled to get an education, became a schoolteacher, and, in her last years, an outspoken opponent of overdevelopment in the region. The early chapters are perhaps the most fascinating, recounting the hunger, cruelty, and unrelenting cycle of labor that were, and in some ways still are, a peasant's lot. This book provides a valuable antidote to Peter Mayle's memoirs of Provence (*A Year in Provence* and *Toujours Provence*, Knopf), for it shows that country life in France is more than one long lunch followed by dinner. (Which, of course, explains why it has not been as popular.)

Needing a light paperback for the flight to France, I picked up *Rabbit at Rest* by John Updike (Ballantine Books, $5.99, 425 pp.) I read very little fiction and even less that is recent, though I make an exception for Updike. (*Rabbit Is Rich*, however, got by me, though of course I read the review.) This latest and supposedly last Rabbit held a certain interest because the first third takes place in Florida. As if in justification of my attraction to travel writing, I found it to be the best thing I had read about contemporary Florida—far surpassing the works of writers who live here.

Poking around the golf clubs and condominiums, Updike found and, in his obsessively detailed style, beautifully captured a Florida that, in spite of all the TV

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shows and newspaper stories, is more real than that of the drug runner and con man. Throughout the book, Updike combines brilliant passages of description with realistic and often hilarious dialogue. In the end, he gives us an invaluable record of a time and place, and a merciless and poetic examination of a man grasping for meaning at the end of a seemingly meaningless life.

Finally, two books that were not new but gave me great pleasure, and shared a connection beyond that. *Joe Gould's Secret*, by Joseph Mitchell (Viking Press, 1965) appeared originally in the *New Yorker* and tells the story of one of the most literary and ultimately pathetic of New York's homeless: Joe Gould, "author" of the *Oral History of Our Time*. Reading this book now, it is fascinating to wonder what people would make of Joe Gould today, and what Joe Gould would make of homelessness. The other book, *Dylan Thomas in America*, by John Malcolm Brinnin (reprinted by Paragon House, $12.95, 303 pp.) gives a frank and at the same time affectionate portrait of a much misunderstood poet who, during his days in the Village, "made good friends with, and played Maecenas to, Joe Gould."

Abigail McCarthy

ABIGAIL McCARTHY, *a famous "quonset person," is a long-time columnist for* Commonweal.

Personal histories fascinate because they can throw light and, perhaps, pattern, on our own. How others dealt with the randomness and the vicissitudes of life, how they sum it up, how their experiences parallel ours, or afford contrast, adds depth and dimension to our own reflections on the past.

The Monk's Tale: A Biography of Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B. (Liturgical Press, $18.95, 383 pp.), the biography of "one of the authentic giants of the liturgical renewal" is, according to Lawrence S. Cunningham who reviewed it (*Commonweal*, October 11, 1991) "a life told against the background of great events and great persons." I found it happy reading because it is the story of a life fulfilled in the faith—rare in these

days. Godfrey Diekmann's life has spanned this turbulent century—he was born in its first decade and still lives and works in the last. He has tackled a multiplicity of tasks from the daily ones of monastic life to leadership roles in worldwide movements—all with diligence, energy, even exuberance.

Fully aware of things as they are, in the 1980s he could yet say, "I for one refuse to be part of the faintheartedness, the pessimism, the fear, that seems currently to have affected so many." And, after a brush with death he does not think of sin or judgment but simply of "how wonderful it all would be, unalloyed peace, serenity, and happiness just waiting for Christ."

A very different message comes from Doris Grumbach in *Coming into the End Zone* (W.W. Norton & Company, $19.95, 256 pp.). This critic, novelist, and former frequent contributor to *Commonweal*, finds herself dreading her approaching seventieth birthday, hating the signs of aging, and preoccupied with death. She is a writer of brooding seriousness and the fears, angers, and sadness she records cannot be ignored because they speak to the universal dread of suffering, decline, and loss, and compel her readers to make a similar effort to confront like fears.

"At sixty-five," she writes, "I must have been resigned to aging and death....But seventy. This is different. The month at seventy seems disastrous, so without redeeming moments that, in despair, I am taking notes, hoping to find in the recording process a positive value to living so long, some glory to survival." And in the very first note she speaks of the plague of AIDS and of the friends it has taken from her. She no longer believes in a next world, she writes. She believes now in the void into which her friends have gone. "I stand on its edge, suffering the usual guilt of the survivor." A grim beginning, almost enough to discourage a reader.

Nevertheless the reader is drawn into the thoughts and happenings of that seventieth year, interested, perhaps, because they are so highly idiosyncratic. In the course of the year, for example, she revisits the great Mayan ruins in Mexico and tells us of her earlier enthrallment with Mayan civilization, "the only civilization I have yearned to be born into," particularly into the period that produced great architecture, astronomy, mythology, and mathematics.

When Doris Grumbach was fifty-four, she left the life she had led for more than thirty years, her marriage, her long-time tenured job, everyone she knew, the city she had lived in for twenty years, and went off to another, different life in Washington, D.C. Now, at seventy, although she wonders whether she could still make such a change, she and her companion, Sybil, plan to leave Washington for Maine. In the course of the book the move comes about. And in the course of the year she becomes reconciled to age, "content with whatever age it is I am." It is worth reading the book to follow this course from despair to acceptance. And worth it, too, to share her musings on, and anecdotes of, a writer's lot in this age of literary decay.

Compared to the other two rather autumnal books, Letty Pogrebin's *Debora, Golda, and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America* (Crown, $22, 377 pp.) fairly seethes with rebellion and advocacy. She is a widely known feminist activist and writer who had to an extent rejected Judaism when she was fifteen. Then she was not allowed to make up the *minyan* (the group of ten) required to say *Kaddish* (the prayers of mourning) for her dead mother—because she was female. "A strange man was called in to say *Kaddish* because he was more Jew than I....I mourned as a daughter and left Judaism behind."

For twenty years her Jewishness lay dormant, while, as a lecturer, author, and editor of *Ms.* magazine, she grew ever more prominent in the women's movement and in the causes feminist women fought for.

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She rediscovered her Jewish identity when she was confronted with the anti-Semitism in the worldwide women's movement—an anti-Semitism made all too visible in the "Zionism is racism" controversy at UN-sponsored conferences in Mexico and Copenhagen.

The Debora of the title refers to Pogrebin's recovery of her spiritual identity, the Golda (for Israeli leader Golda Meir) to that of the secular. The non-Jewish reader will be enriched by her meditations on the Jewish calendar year and her affirmation of ritual: "Ritual is food to the spiritually hungry. Ritual has the potential to heal and warm; to glorify God and reify human devotion; to make objects and places sacred; to create community; to permeate the membrane between religion and peoplehood and bond one person into the whole."

Christian, especially Catholic, feminists, will find many resonances in her rebellion at the exclusions of women from ceremony and language; they may even be surprised that their difficulties with the patriarchy of Rome pale beside the strictures which, in Judaism, relegate women to nonpersonhood, and that the exclusion of women is carried to the point of violence in Israel.

Letty Pogrebin's book ends on a note of hope—her belief that peacemaking and the thirst for justice can transcend the divisions between women of different ethnic and nationalist loyalties... "peace is prerequisite for everything else we care about, especially equality and justice."

Paul Baumann

PAUL BAUMANN *is the associate editor of* Commonweal.

With two prolix old favorites staring at me—Norman Mailer weighing in at an uncompromising 1,300 pages and four pounds (*Harlot's Ghost*, Random House, $30), and John Updike at 900 pages and three pounds (*Odd Jobs*, Knopf, $35)—it is good to be reminded that not all literary heavyweights need to be measured by sheer bulk. Two spare and beautifully written novels, both as stark and enigmatic as parables, lead my list of Christmas suggestions. South Africa's fearless J.M. Coetzee published *Age of Iron* (Random House, $18.95, 198 pp.) in 1990, and David Plante, author of the highly regarded Francoeur family trilogy, came out with *The Accident* (Ticknor & Fields, $18.95, 151 pp.) last spring. Each author is temperamentally economical, the former possessing a more muscular prose, the latter an almost ethereal touch. Coetzee, I think, is the more formidable presence on the page, although Plante's astringent story of a death and its equivocal consequences is something Bernanos or Mauriac would be proud of.

Coetzee (*Waiting for the Barbarians* and the *Life & Times of Michael K*) has been reimagining South Africa's tragic racial destiny for some time. In *Age of Iron* he gives vivid testimony to the apocalyptic uncertainties now pressing in on the white supremacist state. I haven't read a novel as harrowing since V.S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas*. *Age of Iron* is literally a mes-

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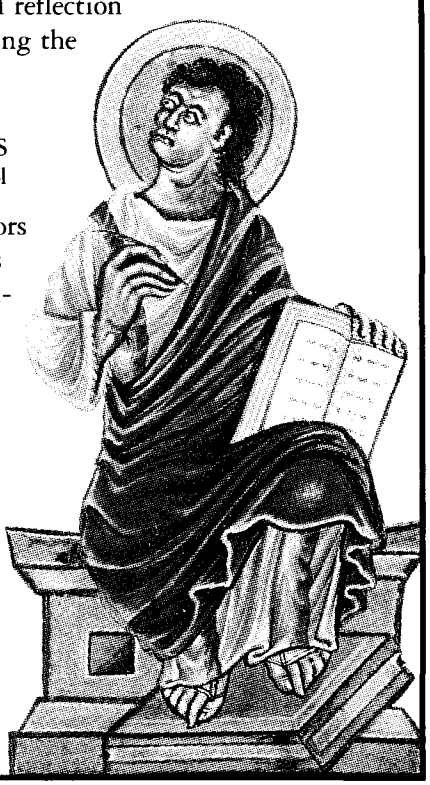

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sage from the dead, the transcript of a letter sent by the narrator, the dying Mrs. Curran, to her daughter in America. Curran is a conflicted and battle-weary South African liberal, and her death from bone cancer both foreshadows and embodies her nation's hopeless situation. Living alone in an affluent Cape Town area, she grudgingly befriends a black vagrant found sleeping on her property. Mr. Verceuil, as he is known, is a "messenger" in the biblical sense, a stranger in whom one's own destiny takes shape and is given direction. Verceuil ushers his white mistress over the threshold, enabling her to face death while affirming a previously unimagined solidarity. Magically, Coetzee infuses his realistic account with such portentous themes. Examining a snapshot of her grandchildren swimming in bright orange life preservers, Curran is offended by the antiseptic conceits of American assumptions about the nature of life. "Perhaps it dispirits me that your children will never drown," she feverishly writes, while the deaths of South Africa's children are an everyday reality. "What can these two poor underprivileged boys paddling about in their recreation area hope for? They will die at seventy-five or eighty as stupid as when they were born....I wish your children life. But the wings you have tied on them will not guarantee them life."

Coetzee is astounding, but Plante is no mere recreational boater. *The Accident* is a severe, almost ascetical exercise, its principal action concerned with what Catholic novels once called a "mystical substitute." The unnamed narrator, a callow and ambitious American of French-Canadian heritage, is nearly incapacitated by vanity and desire—or perhaps by the vanity of desire. The year is 1959. He has come to Belgium to study at the Catholic University of Louvain. "It's the tower where Cornelius Jansen lived and thought up your religion," a woman says, introducing the Brussels neighborhood. At the university he fitfully befriends Tom Donlon, a diligent and unassuming Fordham University student who is wrestling sheepishly with a religious vocation. The narrator's impatience with Tom's religious aspirations is brilliantly captured, as is the wounding pride of a very bright adolescent. Plante is the most fastidious of craftsmen, and the construction of this novel is nearly flawless. We learn almost everything by indirection or association, the emotional colors of the story falling into place like a kaleidoscope's symmetrical mosaic. As in Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*, the story is told by its most religiously alienated character. In such an incredulous voice, the ways of God seem more undeflectable and emphatic than ever. My only complaint is that Plante makes his protagonist such a paragon of spiritual aridity that he is sometimes a tedious companion.

No one could accuse Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, the controversial archbishop of Paris, of being tedious. In *Choosing God—Chosen by God* (Ignatius Press,

$19.95, 423 pp.), Lustiger, a philosopher by training and Jewish by birth, takes on all comers in a series of conversations with two politely aggressive interlocutors. Previously a Catholic chaplain at the Sorborne, Lustiger is not shy about controversy, and is eager to demonstrate Catholicism's compatibility with the highest standards of philosophical or scientific inquiry. He is unsparing (and plain cranky) in his moral critique of the Enlightenment, and bold in his denunciation of French anti-Semitism and France's widespread collaboration with the Nazis. Lustiger's own story—his mother died at Auschwitz—is startling, and of the utmost significance for Catholic-Jewish relations. His eagerness to reconcile Judaism and Catholicism, and his views on the possible religious significance of the state of Israel, are designed to please no one.

Equally erudite, but in a more literary and unmistakably English vein, is Noel Annan's masterly history, *Our Age: English Intellectuals Between the World Wars, A Group Portait* (Random House, $30, 479 pp.). Portrait is the absolutely perfect word—or at least one of what seemed like 10,000 absolutely perfect words. Annan can sketch in a complex argument or compose a profile with a flurry of expert strokes. He writes the way Baryshnikov dances: everything looks easy, and you barely realize how high he's flying. Especially piquant are the portraits of figures such as Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, and the attractive and idiosyncratic conservative philosopher Michael Oakeshott. He takes the full measure of Waugh, right down to his fancy spats, and is appreciative but skeptical about Oakeshott's powerful brief against rationalism in politics. There is, as the English say, something terribly sensible about Annan's every judgment. More important, he makes intellectual passions come alive.

At its worst, of course, the ambition of intellectuals can be the very face of modern tyranny itself. Zygmunt Bauman (no relation), a sociologist at the University of Leeds in England, has written two extraordinary studies on the dehumanizing threat posed by our regard for "experts" and scientific rationality. *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cornell University Press, $29.95, 224 pp.) and *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cornell University Press, $43.50, 285 pp.) are stunning treatments of our most pressing but largely hidden moral confusions. "The Holocaust," Bauman writes, "was not an irrational outflow of the not-yet-fully-eradicated residues of premodern barbarity. It was a legitimate resident in the house of modernity; indeed, one who would not be at home in any other house."

Our bureaucratic and technological age increasingly substitutes an instrumental rationality for moral constraint, Bauman argues. Driven by a naive faith in scientific reason and the dogma of progress, efforts to rationally manage social relations

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inevitably distance us from the sources of human sympathy. A monopolization of force is inherent in the universalizing tendencies of modern social and economic organization. As the behavior of Nazi doctors and scientists attests, our most basic assumptions about human value and dignity are vulnerable to an intellectual devotion to "professionalism" or "objectivity." Modernity's epistemological uncertainties make an acceptance of ambivalence and pluralism essential. "What is to be fought for," Bauman writes, "is above all the right to secure communal, as distinct from individual, diversity; a diversity stemming from a communally chosen and communally serviced form of life." Bauman's sociological perspective is perhaps foreign to most readers, but his writing is clear, and animated by a moral and intellectual urgency that is exhilarating.

Fanny Howe

FANNY HOWE *is a novelist and reviewer. She teaches literature at the University of California at San Diego.*

Biographies and studies of Simone Weil have been proliferating. In the nearly fifty years since she died, she has, despite her gender and her option for religion, established a permanent place for herself among both pure and political philosophers. The drive to incorporate her thought into contemporary social theory indicates a need for her perspective at this time. Those scholars who stop everything to write about her are performing the function of "incorporation"—making her part of the social system. Her genius was manifold. To some she is a liberation theologian, to others a Marxist, to another a utopian, to another a Platonist, and to still another a mystic. I'd especially like to recommend four of these recent studies: *Simone Weil* by Gabriella Fiori (University of Georgia Press, $34.95, 380 pp.), *Utopian Pessimist* by David McLellan (Poseidon Press, $22.45, 346 pp.), *A Truer Liberty: Simone Weil and Marxism* by Lawrence A. Blum and Victor J. Seidler (Routledge, $17.95, 346 pp), and *Just Balance: Reflections on the Philosophy of Simone Weil* by Peter Winch (Cambridge University Press, $15.95, 234 pp.).

In all the biographies we get the same story of a short life and a developing system of enlightened ethics. The correspondence between active and imaginative life is always very tenuous. Good biographers don't violate the space between. Being a great juggler of contradictions, Weil becomes all the more mysterious the closer you get to the facts. Where most biographers seem to hover closest, with greatest confusion, is over the issue of her so-called suicide. Did she want to die, or didn't she?

In 1943, at the time of her death, she was committed to establishing a front-line corps of nurses to go onto the field with soldiers in Europe. It is clear that she was engaged enough in the world's business to want to find a way to take an active role in reversing the tide of brutality. But her poor health, aggravated by depression at being uprooted and a fear of being seen as useless, undermined this project. To this

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reader there is the sense that despite these contradictions, Weil's was a life of the mind, and that she had carried her thought as far as it could go. It is her thinking that puts her in the realm of the blessed, and it is the avenue of her thought that we want to travel down to the end. Like the deepest thinkers of the century—Beckett, Rahner, Wittgenstein—she wore a halo of despair.

Elizabeth Shannon

ELIZABETH SHANNON, *a frequent* Commonweal *contributor, is the author of* I Am of Ireland *(Little, Brown). She lives in Brookline, Massachusetts.*

There is one book I especially want to recommend this year, Elaine Showalter's *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the 'Fin de Siècle'* (Penguin, $9.95, 242 pp.). Showalter is both engaging and scholarly in comparing social, sexual, and political attitudes prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century to our own *fin de siècle*. The parallels she discusses are fascinating in their similarities, but depressing in their recurrence.

She discusses literature, art, and film, both American and English, and finds that the *fin de siecle* brings with it an earthquake of social and sexual upheavals, and that this occurs cyclically, perhaps caused by a "sense of an ending." She quotes Frank Kermode, who suggests that "we project our existential anxieties onto history; there is a real correlation between the ends of centuries and the peculiarity of our imagination, that it [increased anxiety] chooses always to be at the end of an era."

Public dialogue at the end of the nineteenth century created the use of the words "feminism" and "homosexuality." Attempts to redefine gender, to explore sexual and psychological borders, and to understand the meaning of feminine liberation filled the art and literature of the day. Reaction to this "sexual anarchy" was typically reactionary: worries about sexually transmitted disease (particularly syphilis, which had reached epidemic proportions by 1900), concern that the liberation of women would erode family life, and efforts to impose codes of Victorian morality on the whole population.

Late nineteenth-century concern with the horrors of an imminent feminist takeover were fed by fantasy, not fact, and yet "the nineteenth century had cherished a belief in the separate spheres of femininity and masculinity that amounted almost to religious faith...post-Darwinian 'sexual science' offered...testimony on the evolutionary differences between men and women," finding, of course, that "women's nurturant domestic capabilities fitted them for home and hearth...while men's aggressive, competitive abilities fitted them for public life."

John Nixon, Jr.

La Marquise

Women are looking glasses,
Reflecting men.
One, named the Pompadour,
Had been so highly polished
That she could mirror
Not just her Bourbon friend
But—mortally brilliant
There beyond his shoulder—
A whole jeweled era.
Blazing toward doom.

While women looked for a new feminist order at the turn of the last century, men too searched for new definitions of masculinity. In the world of male "Clubland," and in the literature of "quest romances," written especially for boys ("little boys who read will become big boys who rule"), the need for male superiority and exclusiveness became a virulent theme. Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote in 1886 that "the begetting of one's thoughts on paper...is a kind of male gift," and writers of the period fantasized about alternate forms of male reproduction, such as "splitting or cloning, as in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; reincarnation, as in Rider Haggard's *She*; transfusion, as in *Dracula*; aesthetic duplication, as in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*...."

All have a familiar echo as the last decade of our century draws to a close. AIDS has taken the place of syphilis, the right-wing movement in America still tries to impose cultural and artistic censorship on our population, the senators who sought to degrade Anita Hill could have quoted Teddy Roosevelt at the turn of the century: "There is no place in the world for nations who have...lost their fiber of vigorous hardness and masculinity."

The parallels in Ms. Showalter's book are not only in the sexual arena; the last two decades of the nineteenth century in England were a time of severe economic depression, and the expression "unemployment" was coined, an expression used with frightening and relentless repetition in America today. The homeless population of America's cities, camped out on hot air vents, must be reminiscent of London in the 1890s, where hordes of people made a home in Trafalgar Square and the city's parks.

Ms. Showalter's writing is crisp, full of verve, anecdotes, and wit; though well-researched, the book avoids the pitfalls of academic dryness. She has no ax to grind; her book is not a political statement nor a sociological scaremonger. She detaches herself by her humor and scholarship. Most of her facts are annotated and the viewpoints provided in quotations from acknowledged and usually witty sources.

Her picture of the dreary past makes a return to it impossible, and she is optimistic about the future. As she describes the Genitron, an electric clock above the Pompidou Center in Paris, flashing the remaining seconds and minutes of the decade, time cannot be stopped or turned back... "nor can we legislate or intimidate men and women into shame and repression of the past. We must not allow fear to push us into cruel homophobia, make us abandon our commitment to women's sexual autonomy, or lead us to repudiate the *fin-de-siècle* vision of a future in which sexuality is a source of pleasure, comfort, and joy....What seems today like the apocalyptic warnings of a frightening sexual anarchy may be really the birth throes of a new sexual equality."

I wish I could give copies of her book as Christmas presents to members of the United States Senate.

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'ECCLESIA SEMPER REFORMANDA'

A FURTHER EXCHANGE OF VIEWS

The following letters respond to an exchange of views published October 11 between Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, editor of Commonweal, *and Thomas A. McCabe, co-chairman of a conference sponsored by CORPUS (Corps of Reserve Priests United for Service), at which Ms. Steinfels criticized the group's decision to include in the program a celebration of the Eucharist by priest-members who have left the active ministry. Space did not allow publication of all letters received; some of those published here have been condensed.*

You have to be there

Boulder City, Nev.

To the Editors: I extend my sincerest appreciation to Margaret O'Brien Steinfels for her candid and most sensitive approach in her suggestions to CORPUS. But there is a dimension missing in her life that comes out so clearly in the response by Thomas A. McCabe. Steinfels can use her God-given gifts, but the members of CORPUS have been thwarted from using their God-given gifts by means of a man-made law which, according to Rome, has become more important than the Eucharist. No one can fully understand this pain unless that frustrated person is a member of the clergy. A pastor was recently admonished by his bishop to stop using inclusive language in liturgy or he would be suspended by the bishop. Imagine being suspended for changing a singular noun, "man," to a plural pronoun, "us." The clergy were not in touch with the pain of Martin Luther King, Jr., in that Birmingham jail; Steinfels, as sincere as she is, is not in touch with the pain of many of us in ministry.

(REV.) JOSEPH P. ANNESE

Justice comes first

Yorktown Heights, N.Y.

To the Editors: The same week I received a copy of *Commonweal* with its cover drawing of Margaret O'Brien Steinfels punching Tom McCabe in the nose, our parish bulletin contained a letter from the pastor announcing that by virtue of an order from Cardinal O'Connor our parish would be discontinuing the ministry of female altar servers. At the liturgy that day, my four-year-old daughter, with her usual impeccable timing, watched the Offertory procession led by two candle-bearers, and asked my wife, "Mommy, when I get big can I do that?"

Our church, dominated by male celibates, is suffocating under its need to control, to keep things as they are. Of course female altar servers, women priests, married clergy are not the ultimate answers to the problems of our world and our church. But they are significant issues. If

LITURGICAL CONFERENCE PLAYED BY THE RULES

Collegeville, Minn.

To the Editors: Without entering into the substance of the Steinfels-McCabe exchange, a point of fact:

The Liturgical *Conference* (not *movement*) sponsored twenty-nine Liturgical *Weeks* (not *conferences*) between 1942 and 1977 (the sponsor of the first two, in 1940 and 1941, was the Conference of Benedictine Abbots). I served on the Liturgical Conference's board of directors in interrupted terms from 1959 onward and as president 1962-64, the latter the year of the earliest changes in the Roman rite by liturgical law enacted at Vatican II.

The Weeks between 1942 and 1968 were co-sponsored by the Conference and a local Catholic diocese. Because bishops are custodians of liturgical and other church law, and out of the board's own conviction, the Conference took pains in its planning sessions and the execution of the Weeks to do nothing contrary to then current liturgical law. Sacramental celebrations at the Weeks were often inventive and initiatory but never in contravention of the Code of Canon Law of 1918 or various responses to inquiries put to curial congregations. The public talks at the Weeks, by contrast, often asked for changes that most often represented a return to earlier tradition. The conciliar legislation and the revised ritual books it mandated responded to many of these.

Numerous aspects of eucharistic celebration at the Weeks were well within church law but not widely known to be such (examples: free-standing altars in a large space, as in the Roman basilicas, resulting in the presider's facing some celebrants; presbyters standing around the altar and communicating but not concelebrating until its approval at law). The one exception to all of the above was the presiding of Joseph Elmer Ritter, Cardinal Archbishop of St. Louis, in English and facing the congregation in August 1964. This anticipated the agreed-upon first Sunday of Advent "for widespread instructional purposes," as he said in an agreement with the Conference board.

Much tension and controversy did result over the years, but not because laws were broken. Rather, because many did not examine the latitude the laws allowed, nor cared to learn about it.

I do not argue for or against the position of Steinfels or McCabe in this matter, only recall a little history.

(REV.) GERARD SLOYAN

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we really want to bring the gospel to a world that needs to hear it, we must have justice and equality within the church. Right now we are committing institutional suicide. It has been said that in the nineteenth century the church lost the working class in Europe. In the twentieth century the church will lose women in North America.

In June, I, a married priest, celebrated the Eucharist at the CORPUS gathering. I did it as a sign of hope—hope in a church that can be inclusive of all people, that can proclaim justice to the world while living that justice within, that can "read the signs of the times" and offer her people a dynamic priesthood of celibate and married people united in service. I celebrated that liturgy because I love and believe in our church as a community that conveys the gospel.

DOUG FISHER

We burn, Rome diddles

Commerce, Tex.

To the Editors: Your Steinfels-McCabe exchange is quite timely. To borrow from the language of the Senate Judiciary Committee farce, we Catholics are indulging in a Kafkaesque orgy of spiritual harassment. The basic facts are undeniable, yet we act as if they have no bearing on our problems.

To limit discussion to questions of worship: John Paul II continues to proclaim

(Continued on page 731)

"And I'm not very optimistic about the Middle East peace talks either."

CHANGE IN CHURCH STARTS FROM BELOW

Calumet City, Ill.

To the Editors: I have been a church-change watcher for decades. My basic thesis is that change starts at the bottom and works its way to the top. This was a thesis of Cardinal John Henry Newman. The faith of the church is in the church, meaning the people.

In the late fifties Bishop Ernest Primeau of Manchester, N.H., was incensed that the priests were not putting the pall on the chalice after the consecration. He ordered the abuse stopped immediately. The pall had covered the chalice to keep the flies out. Who remembers the pall?

A friend came back from a tour of Germany and said that Mass was being said facing the people. I said, "It is against the law," but found myself a few years later initiating the change before Rome had made the move.

In the fall of '68 I was a week-end assistant at a blue-collar Chicago parish. I sat in the presider's chair waiting for a layman to serve as lector. No one showed, so out of the congregation came an attractive young woman who crossed the sanctuary rail and read with poise. We men did a double take. At the same parish a young woman held out her hand for Communion. I pulled back my head and blinked, and then put the bread in her hand. She had been doing this regularly at the Newman Center.

Cardinal Cody called a local pastor and told him that he had heard people were receiving Communion in the hand. The practice spread so quickly that the bishops were embarrassed when they could not get the two-thirds vote to approve it and had to wait another six months to get the vote to petition Rome.

We had altar girls at my parish, St. Victor, when I arrived in 1979. About five years later Cardinal Bernardin banned the girls. This received wide publicity and gave priests and parents new insights; the practice spread quickly. Now it is approved by the cardinal. It reminds me of the Roman cab driver who in 1968 said that the pope should not have banned the pill. It was giving ideas to Italian women.

Over the past decade the confessional has had to be dusted often. Creative pastors have put together a reconciliation service that packs the church during the Advent and Easter seasons. No one can tell the people it is cheap grace. It is not routine. For many it is a conversion experience. The pope and bishops are trying to blot it out. The faith of the people is too deep to keep them from a reconciliation service that often moves them to tears. Pastors are not caving in. The practice is growing.

In a rural diocese the new bishop told pastors they were to go back to the practice of first confession before first Communion. The pastors refused. They respected the faith of the people.

Over a decade ago some priests left the word "men" out of the words of consecration. Bishops quickly petitioned Rome to okay it. After we make the obvious changes—e.g., from "men" to "men and women"—eliminating sexist language in the liturgy is not simple; scholarship is needed to preserve the meaning of the text. Bishops are under the gun to fund the research; it is in process, but the prompting always comes from below.

Now to resigned priests saying Mass. There is no question that there has long been a consensus favoring the practice. Better a married priest who does not have the permission of the bishop than a Communion service. This is not a radical move, as it would be for the community to ordain.

The concelebration by the priests at the CORPUS service and the attendant publicity, including the presentation by Margaret Steinfels, expanded the imagination of American Catholics and was a powerful incentive for the bishops to go public on how they really feel about married priests. Lay people do need to see the picture from the wider perspective of bishops and popes. When they refuse to speak, lay people and parish priests can hope to start dialogue by acting on their own.

DENNIS J. GEANEY, O.S.A.

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the centrality of the Eucharist, yet blandly denies the need to provide presiders. Do we not face a crisis posed by a dwindling, overburdened, and increasingly geriatric clergy? Yet, at least publicly, there has been no response but a barely audible tongue-clucking to Archbishop Rembert Weakland's tentative gesture toward a solution. Why is the response of the hierarchy so anemic?

If we are to retain any sense of relevance, we must accept a broader married priesthood (we already have some married priests). It should be open to the CORPUS contingent, and, yes, it should acknowledge that women, too, are people of God.

EDWARD M. CORBETT

The people, No

Chicago, Ill.

To the Editors: What is missing from many recent discussions about the Eucharist and who may celebrate it is *the community of faith*. Both Margaret O'Brien Steinfels's address to CORPUS and Thomas McCabe's response do not seriously consider this reality.

The community of faith is a necessary foundation for Eucharist. In Steinfels's speech, there is scant attention given to the community of faith's role in Eucharist. She equates Eucharist exclusively both with the ordained and with the authority of the church.

McCabe's response also stands at some distance from the community of faith. Although he writes about "the people's right to the Eucharist and to pastoral care," he does so in a way that creates a passive posture for the community of faith. His response pictures the faith community as receiver of Eucharist supplied solely through the conduit of ordained priests; they are seen as the only gateways for communities of faith to be eucharistic. Such a sacramental theology neatly furthers CORPUS's political agenda of reinstatement of resigned priests at the expense of the community of faith's indispensable and substantive role in celebrating the Eucharist.

I am unwilling to allow the definition of what is Eucharist, and, conversely, what is Eucharistless, to rest totally on the presence of an ordained priest. Eucharist must be connected existentially with communities of faith, ritually with the entire assembly of the faithful, and institutionally with the wider church universal. Any understanding of Eucharist which ignores any one of these dimensions is incomplete.

PETER GILMOUR

The writer is assistant professor of pastoral studies at Loyola University, Chicago, and author of The Emerging Pastor *(Sheed and Ward, 1986), a study of nonordained people pastoring Catholic parishes.*

LET THE FISH FRY PROCEED—BUT CALMLY

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: The issues raised by Margaret Steinfels in her address to CORPUS have long needed airing by a spokesperson with sound credentials and the courage to take a stand.

Ms. Steinfels's identification of the American "I want it yesterday" attitude as a significant element in the strident movements of today is, I think, highly valid. Her description of the scholarship and serious intellectual questing which were integral parts of the liturgical movement reminded me of Cardinal Newman's insights on the development of Christian doctrine. The process he identifies in his essay on that subject is, I believe, very much what we are experiencing today. His calm, unrelenting, scrupulously honest quest for truth—for himself and for the church—has given me a new perspective on some pretty soul-wrenching conundrums.

Too often I have found myself confronted with manipulations of Eucharist which make of our most sacred action a tool of confrontation, as well as with knee-jerk assumptions by individuals on both ends of the spectrum of confrontation. And I am convinced with Ms. Steinfels that we need more objective, self-reflective self-criticism, and *much* more calm "evaluating of proposals regardless of pedigree." I believe it is absolutely essential that the "party of resistance" and the "party of change" begin to talk with one another again, rather than simply among themselves. Rational discourse, respectful listening, mutual refinement of ideas are all elements of the long, hard process of the development of ideas—elements that must be fostered if any inroads are to be made in the sad polarization of today.

I have studied and taught history, and the Second Vatican Council has been an important part of my agenda for much of my adult life. My historical instincts tell me that part of our dilemma is that we are still too close to the council. In spite of instant communication, the human psyche still requires time to absorb, integrate, respond to change—and the long-term goals of the council are not likely to be achieved in our lifetimes. These times call for a certain self-abnegation, the recognition that we are not the last or most important generation of the church. We are part of a long, long procession of people, each of whom has played a part in the building of the church—a church which will not stand or fall on successes, even religiously motivated successes—in this world; a church which calls us to give ourselves wholly to the human works of our day, always with an eye to the kingdom that lies beyond.

JANET BAXENDALE, S.C.

The writer is executive secretary of the Liturgical Commission, Archdiocese of New York.

Think wider

Stamford, Conn.

To the Editors: The Catholic church does not need married priests and women priests solely to address a priest shortage. Married and women priests are needed because they too are people of God, purveyors of the Spirit, vessels of knowledge, wisdom, and compassion that an all-anything priesthood cannot by nature supply.

We need, as in all things, to be wary of the media; to be gracious; to "do good to those who disagree with us." We also need to challenge, to be inclusive, to listen to the theologians (not to silence them), and to open ourselves to the Spirit always mov-

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ing in the church. I think many Catholics have too protective, too narrow a vision of our Eucharist. If we enlarge our vision, we will be able to see the Eucharist in all things. ANTOINETTE PAGE

Promises, promises

Gainesville, Fla.

To the Editors: When priests petition the church for laicization, release from the promise of celibacy, and approval to enter the sacrament of marriage, it has been the practice of most dioceses to elicit specific promises of postlaicization behavior as a precondition to processing the petition. Thus, each of us, as we took the step of putting aside active ministry, had a difficult yet free decision to make that paralleled the prior decision requesting ordination.

Now, some members of CORPUS have determined to act contrary to the promises they freely made to the church, yet criticize the church, members of the hierarchy, and others who don't condone their behavior.

Ms. Steinfels did not ask CORPUS members to cease "efforts to renew the priesthood and to build the kingdom of God through their work in the world." She asked only that CORPUS members do it pursuant to conditions they freely accepted.

FRANK WEBSTER

Give talk a chance

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: Peggy Steinfels was right. My wife and I were at the CORPUS conference, and we stayed away from the Fifth Avenue prayer service and the Mass.

It would have been wonderful if, instead, all 750 of us, priests, wives, and children, had gone quietly to the scheduled 5 P.M. Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral. We could have worn proudly our red CORPUS buttons and our name tags.

Self-righteous groups like ACT-UP and Operation Rescue have given mass (no pun intended) demonstrations a bad name. It's time to give self-appointed prophets a sabbatical. Give civility and dialogue a chance. Some reforms—no matter how long overdue—can't be rushed. We know the bishops won't take on this pope over married priests. And John Paul II will probably outlive many of us who are card-carrying members of CORPUS.

What I don't understand is why all the overworked pastors don't put willing married priests to work as lay ministers in the parishes. Most parishes can use leaders with solid backgrounds in theology, Scripture, and liturgy to run adult discussions and RCIA, train liturgical ministers, serve on parish councils, organize social justice ministry. And why don't bishops call on local married priests to serve on diocesan committees and councils?

Our disappointment with Steinfels was that she wasted an opportunity to begin a new dialogue with that friendly audience of 750 committed Catholics. Ten minutes was enough time to scold us about dumb tactics. What we wanted was a vintage Steinfels talk about church, Eucharist, ministry, small-group strategies, adult religious education—the hopeful whir of the Spirit's wings. P. DAVID FINKS

This is martyrdom?

Corpus Christi, Tex.

To the Editors: As a member of CORPUS let me state strongly that Margaret O'Brien Steinfels is right and Thomas McCabe is wrong. I am embarrassed that CORPUS spokesmen would compare our situation to the sufferings of African-Americans or to the early martyrs. I am not a martyr. I believe few of us suffer very much. We have good marriages and make good money.

I think we would be well advised to spend the rest of our lives undoing the damage we caused by leaving the active ministry. We married "priests" now outnumber the priests who stayed and really suffered, not only from celibacy but also from the shortage of priests caused by our leaving. In the vast majority of cases, our families, our brother priests, and the bishops and religious superiors who facilitated our dispensations were more tolerant than we deserved. We had the good fortune to receive a free education from the church, leave, and then continue to take part in the life of the church, if we wanted, in a more propitious time in church history.

I belong to CORPUS because it makes a good support group. CORPUS tries to confront not a moral issue, as McCabe believes, but a political one. I prefer to take my politics from the Democratic party. Next year I wish the Democrats would invite Steinfels to their convention. They need her advice on special interest groups, the kind that CORPUS seems to have become. JAMES E. O'LEARY

Check that map again

Birmingham, Ala.

To the Editors: Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, with admirable directness, expressed her fear that our church's center might not hold, or, at least, hold that well. Thomas A. McCabe replies with the claim that his movement is at the center. There is, he argues, a Catholic left wing that allows for a universal (celebrant) priesthood merely "by virtue of baptism," that the right wing holds to a canon-strictured notion of (celebrant) priesthood, and thus his ecclesiastical disobedience, premised on "respect for the reality of the ordained priesthood," positions him as a Catholic centrist.

McCabe's analysis fails because what he designates as the left wing is a very small minority, too tiny to locate on the map with which we find the center. I hope to see McCabe back in the pulpit some day, but I trust he'll bring an improved sense of the masses.

KEVIN DOYLE

The real failure

Neligh, Neb.

To the Editors: As a seminarian I was intrigued by the positions taken by both Thomas McCabe and Margaret Steinfels, but had more sympathy with Steinfels.

McCabe's comparison of the married clergy movement with the struggle for civil rights misstates the issue. The civil rights movement was a rebellion against the systematic deprivation and enslavement of an entire race. CORPUS members may be justified in considering themselves victims of oppression, but comparing their lot with that of blacks is like comparing a massacre with a mistaken arrest for speeding.

By basing his argument for a married priesthood so largely on the contention that "it is immoral to allow priestless Sundays," McCabe rests his case on quantity, not quality. I suggest that the crisis of too few voca-

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tions cannot be solved by opening the doors to other classes of ordination candidates. The crisis is pervasive in the church, and it rises out of our failure as a church to identify with the poor and underprivileged. We will not solve the priest shortage by use of extra-ecclesial means but by humbly accepting the obedience Christ demands so that others may be led to intimacy with God. Only then can we tackle the issue of a male-celibate clergy.

STANLEY L. KASUN

The pot & the kettle

Kensington, Calif.

To the Editors: In giving her speech to CORPUS Steinfels seemed unaware that the tactic she accused CORPUS of using—staging a media event to advance its cause—is precisely what she did that day. As a board member of CORPUS I was aware of the preconvention misgivings she had about participating in the event after she learned about the scheduled Mass and prayer vigil.

She had the chance to withdraw. She chose not to. Subsequent events suggest she decided to use the occasion to her own ends, including the blockading of copies of her talk up to one hour before it was scheduled.

Why the subterfuge and secrecy? She certainly could have been more candid about her intent. Like *Commonweal*, CORPUS welcomes dialogue, including differences of opinion. I am pained not by what Steinfels said but how she went about saying it. I expected more openness from one identified with the party of change.

Media event? For sure. Editor Steinfels knows about using the media.

ROBERT L. CHARPENTIER

The writer is vice-president of CORPUS.

The author replies:

Secrecy? Subterfuge? By his own account, Robert Charpentier knew about my "misgivings" before the meeting. Presumably he knew because as soon as I learned of the planned Mass I told the CORPUS representative who had invited me (Thomas McCabe) that I objected and was thinking about withdrawing. He agreed that if I had a "problem in conscience," then I should withdraw.

My problem was not *my* conscience, but CORPUS's intended action. If I gave the talk I had planned, I would be complicit in that action; if I withdrew, I would be doing what liberals like myself (and conservatives as well) too often do, hold back criticism of one's allies in order not to hurt the cause. My colleagues at *Commonweal* urged me to speak my mind. I then informed McCabe in advance that my talk would be critical.

My chief "end" in speaking was to persuade the members of the audience to reconsider taking part in the Mass—a goal that I am sorry I failed to achieve. The reason for distributing copies of my talk was to make sure that people—both those present and others, particularly reporters—would be able to have the full text. As is common (and distinctly unsinister) practice, the talk was embargoed (not "blockaded") until the scheduled hour of my speech.

MARGARET O'BRIEN STEINFELS

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 706)

translated literally, "Therefore, the Thing being carried [in Mary's womb] shall be called Holy, Son of God." Similarly, in Matthew 1:20, the angel says to Joseph, "The Thing begotten in her [Mary] is of the Holy Spirit." In both cases what I have translated "the Thing" is represented in the Greek by the neuter definite article followed by a participle.

Mr. McConnell believes that "the mother—and the father, too, has the right to dispose of [the Thing in the Womb] if it would make their lives miserable, and if they both agree on that." Readers of the Gospels can agree that the Thing in Mary's womb threatened to make the parents' lives miserable. And, in fact, to the extent that the cause of a person's misery is merely what happens to him or her, apart from the accompanying thoughts and attitudes (faith, for instance, or love), the Thing *did* cause misery for Joseph and Mary, in the womb and out of it. Yet there is no suggestion that mother and father ever sought to dispose of the Thing.

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But that is not to say the threatening Thing itself remained unthreatened. On the contrary, upon hearing the news of the birth of the Thing, now named Jesus because It would save Its people from their sins, the ruling authority became disturbed in mind and sought Its elimination. That first attempt failed, but a later one did not.

Still in a biblical mode, I would apply to this Living Something verse 16 of Psalm 139: "Your eyes could see my embryo. In your book all my days were inscribed, every one that was fixed is there."

(REV.) MARK A. SCOTT, O.C.S.O.

Projustice, prolife

York Harbor, Maine

To the Editors: I think it is not accurate to put the label "pro-abortion" on people who believe that life is sacred but do not pin their hope of persuading others on the enactment of anti-abortion laws. In 1918, to stop drunkenness, we passed the Prohibition amendment, which produced contempt for law and a generation of alcoholics, along with bands of criminals who engaged in murder and gang wars while amassing great fortunes.

The prolife movement is most successful when it relies on friendly persuasion. Also, the demand for abortions is in part the product of social conditions that can be changed if we have the will. By way of example:

A married friend of my daughter's was fired from her teaching job in a Catholic school because she asked for a one-month maternity leave; the mother superior said it would not be convenient.

Another young woman I know, close to death from an infection, was advised that a dose of antibiotics sufficient to save her life would kill the baby, and that the best chance for her and the child would be a Caesarian section without anesthesia. She accepted, and both the baby and his heroic mother were saved. But the hospital and doctor bills came to $160,000, of which she and her husband had to pay $60,000. Moreover, she lost her job (ironically, she was the manager of a *toy* store) because the insurance premiums were raised so high that her employer said he could not afford to keep her.

These are two of many similar stories. More humane conditions of employment, a fairer distribution of wealth, a national health plan, and a family leave bill would make it far easier for many to choose life. Unfortunately, many "prolife" people seem to condemn the party that favors such measures, and instead embrace the party that resists the use of tax funds for social purposes. In my view, being prolife includes loving and caring for people of all ages.

HENRIETTA DANA RAYMOND

"Well, Mr. Critic, you've *been criticized."*

New nuclear threat

Bowie, Md.

To the Editors: In his column on "The Proliferation Problem" [October 25], Bryan Hehir has again pinpointed with precision the nuclear risks the world faces resulting from the collapse of the Soviet threat. Unquestionably, this potential proliferation of nuclear powers can be exponential, absent immediate international actions to prevent unbridled national and mercenary efforts to achieve nuclear capability.

I am concerned about an equally imminent threat. No matter how great the danger created by the almost uncontrolled generation of nuclear weapons by the U.S. and the USSR, yet that more or less balanced threat had a dampening effect on other conflicts because even adventurous governments had reason to fear the risk of touching off global nuclear war. With that threat greatly diminished, we may see more Desert Storms in the future.

Father Hehir needs to bring his formidable skills as a passionate advocate for peace to bear on this issue as well. I want to hear no more about "just wars," but rather of a "just peace." The last "just war" accomplished absolutely zero. The "new world order" is not an acceptable solution, and I do not see governments or international bodies giving this very serious attention.

BARTHOLOMEW J. MERELLA

Altar girls & ethics

Belleview, Fla.

To the Editors: I enjoyed the article by Bridget Balthrop Morton ["Hey, Bishop!," November 8]. Our practice of excluding Ellen Grace and her sisters from serving at Mass is discriminatory, and therefore immoral. There is no moral or ethical difference between excluding a black child from serving at Mass because he is black and excluding a girl from serving because she is female.

It puzzles me why so many Catholic clergy, both bishops and priests, fail to draw the obvious conclusion. No one is obliged to obey an unjust law; on the contrary, if application of an unjust law entails injury to an innocent third party, one is bound to refuse obedience. That is the principle clearly endorsed at Nuremberg; it seems

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to me to be generally accepted in Western ethics by those whose education has taken them beyond indoctrination. I vividly recall learning the principle as part of my seminary training in ethics and morality. Yet so many of our clergy, who presumably learned that same ethical rule, either fail to see its relevance or, seeing it, fail to act upon it. Some seem to think that obedience has a higher moral claim. They have learned nothing from the rejection of that defense at Nuremberg.

(REV.) JAMES MacLOUGHLIN

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